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**Scalecraft:
Policy and Practice in
England's Academy
Schools**

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PhD

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Declaration

I, Natalie Papanastasiou, declare that I have composed this thesis, that it is entirely my own work and that it has not been submitted for any other degree or professional qualification. I have obtained permission from Symposium Journals Ltd to include an article I published in 2013 in the Appendix of this thesis.

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Abstract

This thesis examines England's academy schools policy by integrating interpretive policy analysis (IPA) with a critical approach to scale. The thesis begins with the observation that studies of policy have an underdeveloped conceptualisation of scale. The concept of scale used here refers to how the social world is perceived to be vertically ordered and is given labels such as the 'local', 'national' and 'global'. Categories of scale have typically been used by policy actors and social scientists alike to describe, understand and analyse policy. Policy and scale are thus inextricably linked and this thesis seeks to study policy by critically engaging with scale and in this way develops a research focus that has been largely unexplored.

The implementation studies literature is identified as being a particularly striking example of policy analysis which has tended to use categories of scale in an unquestioned manner. Implementation studies have a tradition of discussing 'bottom-up' or 'top-down' processes which reveal an analytical framework that assumes the existence of a scalar hierarchy. While the thesis supports the critiques of implementation studies made by scholars associated with IPA, it is argued that the interpretive critique has not been extended to the concept of scale. In order to address the problematic approach to scale in interpretive studies of policy this thesis examines how actors adopt 'scalar practices' in their policy work, which is consistent with the critical approach to scale that has been developed by post-structuralist human geographers. The latter group of scholars describe scalar practices as the way actors use categories of scale to *interpret* and *strategically construct* their social worlds. A focus on scalar practices allows for scale to be understood as an epistemological concept; this marks a departure from how social scientists have tended to use scalar categories to explain things *with* which has, in turn, problematically suggested that scale has an ontological existence.

Education has been identified as an arena where representative struggles over scale come sharply into focus. The way in which education has been mobilised in relation to a wide range of scalar constructs such as the state, local authorities and a school's catchment area, demonstrates how education is understood to be part of a political world which is ordered according to a vertical hierarchy of scales. This is particularly striking in the case of England's academies policy. The official policy narrative of academies describes how a school converting to academy status becomes free from local authority control, becomes directly accountable to the state and gains greater levels of individual autonomy. It is thus a policy that is underpinned by distinctly scalar claims, making it a highly appropriate case study through which to explore the scalar practices of policy actors.

The case study design of the research project focused on two local authorities and four academies within each of these. Interviews were carried out with local authority officers, academy sponsors, principals and chairs of governors. The study identifies how actors deploy four key scalar practices: constructing scalar boundaries, dissolving scalar boundaries, shifting between scales and emphasising the interconnectedness of scales. A theoretical approach called the *practice of scalecraft* is subsequently developed which not only focuses on the nature of scalar practices but also on what kinds of political concepts underpin these practices. The thesis concludes by suggesting that scalecraft can be used as a framework through which to incorporate a critical approach to scale in future interpretive studies of policy.

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CHAPTER 1

Introduction

This thesis begins with the following observation: that attempts to understand policy are inextricably linked to an inquiry about scale. The concept of scale which is used here refers to the perceived vertical ordering of the social world where this hierarchy or scaffolding is given labels such as the ‘local’, ‘national’ and ‘global’. Scale has been embedded in some of the oldest questions that have been raised in the study of policy. One of these questions relates to how and why there is a ‘gap’ between the goals or visions of policy and its outcomes (Pressman and Wildavsky 1973; Hargrove 1975). Studies of ‘implementation’ most notably explored this question between the 1970s until the late 1990s and they did so by relying on ideas of *scale*. Identifying a disconnect between ‘national’ policy and its ‘local’ implementation, focusing on how policy is implemented in a ‘top-down’ manner, and the effect of ‘bottom-up’ influences on policy are examples of how implementation studies explored policy through the structures of scale.¹ These studies both assumed the existence of scales and used scalar categories to structure analysis. However, this preoccupation with scale was unquestioned and as a result a critical engagement with the concept of scale remained absent.

Although traditional implementation studies no longer dominate political science and public administration, their core preoccupation with scale and policy remains a key, taken-for-granted feature of policy studies. One of the most notable critiques of classic implementation studies has stemmed from interpretive approaches to policy. The latter approaches have argued that understanding policy and its ‘implementation’ requires a different analytical focus which instead explores ‘how a policy means’ (Yanow 1996). Interpretive policy analysis (IPA) focuses on how policy is interpreted by actors and how

¹ A similar argument could be made about the ‘multi-level governance’ literature, which understands the social world being governed according to vertically ordered layers or levels.

these interpretations co-construct meanings and representations of policy. A key tenet of approaching policy interpretively is to focus on the actions and representations practiced by policy actors when they are confronted with the task of implementing or responding to policy. Interpretive approaches continue to make reference to ideas of scale in their study of policy, for example by making arguments about ‘local’ knowledge, by categorising actors according to the scale they occupy, or by referring to different ‘levels’ of policymaking. While IPA explores representations and meanings in the study of policy a critical engagement with the representations related to the concept of scale has been largely absent.

While this thesis situates itself in interpretive policy studies, its overarching puzzle originates in human geographers’ preoccupation and critical engagement with the concept of ‘scale’. More specifically, it considers the argument made by post-structuralist human geographers that scale does not have an ontological existence but that it is instead an epistemological concept which is used by actors to make sense of their social worlds (Jones 1998). Authors associated with this position have argued that scale has been problematically assigned an ontological status by social scientists using scale as a ‘category of analysis’: an analytical category used to explain things *with*. It is proposed that researchers should instead approach scale as a ‘category of practice’ which involves understanding scale to be a socially constructed category used by actors in their everyday work (Moore 2008). Post-structuralist geographers argue that research should explore the *scalar practices* of social actors by scrutinising the process through which scales are used by actors to interpret and strategically shape their social worlds.

Returning to a focus on policy, these arguments serve to underline how scale has remained uncritically examined in studies of policy, including the critical approaches associated with IPA. In light of this, a research puzzle emerges which identifies this theoretical gap and reflects on whether there is potential to further develop interpretive understandings of policy by critically approaching scale as a category of practice. In order to empirically explore this research puzzle the following overarching research question has been formulated:

*What kinds of scalar practices do actors deploy during their policy work,
and what kinds of politics do these practices comprise?*

The research question reflects both an interpretivist interest in exploring the meaning-making processes and practices of actors who engage with policy, as well as post-structuralist human geographers' conceptualisation of scale as a category of practice.

This thesis uses the policy area of education as a means through which to explore the research puzzle. Education can be considered an arena where representational struggles over scale are brought sharply into focus. The rise of mass education systems in 19th century Europe coincided with the establishment of long-standing nation states (Green 1990), which meant the scalar boundaries of education were represented as being 'national' in nature. In recent years education has been defined in relation to the European and global scales. Authors such as Nóvoa and Lawn (2002) have described how education has been increasingly mobilised as a means through which to construct the European project (Grek 2009). Parallel to this, the roles of global transnational organisations such as the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development and the World Bank have contributed to education being defined according to scalar boundaries which are of a global nature (Rizvi and Lingard 2010; Robertson 2005). Policymakers also have a long-standing preoccupation with classifying education in relation to scalar categories within the perceived boundaries of the state. Issues of scale have been the source of many policy debates and reforms regarding the provision of 'local' schooling. In the case of England's schooling system, 'local' provision has been related to the role of local authorities but has also increasingly been defined according to individual schools (Sharp 2002). Policy debates about how to distribute responsibilities of school education between local authorities and individual schools have consistently mobilised concepts of scale, for example by discussing the local authority as the 'middle tier' or schools as needing to serve their 'local community'.²

A policy which exposes how scalar preoccupations are embedded in education policy is England's 'academies policy'. The official narrative of academies claims that when a school

² Importantly, these struggles to define education according to the idea of a vertical hierarchy of scales expose the complex nature of the scale concept. Scalar categories are used in policy to simultaneously relate to levels of administration (such as local authorities), geographical area (such as the school catchment area) as well as relating to labels such as the 'local' and 'national'. The way these multiple meanings of scale are constructed and intersect in the context of policy is what this thesis seeks to understand and problematise.

becomes an academy it gains more individual autonomy, becomes free from local authority control, and is directly accountable to the state. Thus, the academies policy is underpinned by three scalar representations: individual schools, local authorities, and the state. The distinctly scalar nature of the policy's claims therefore makes academies a particularly fitting focus for empirically investigating the thesis' overarching research puzzle. Academies have been one of the most controversial and widely-debated education policies in England for over a decade. The policy became the focal point of the New Labour government's education vision after it was launched in 2000 and academies have continued to be instrumental to the post-2010 Coalition government's education reforms. The controversy and debate that has surrounded academies has hinged on the way the policy has stirred up fundamental questions about the governance of education. Academies make distinct claims which relate to questions that include what role the state should play in education, to whom schools should be accountable, whether schools should place their individual interests above all else, about what responsibilities are held by local authorities, and what is meant by the concept of 'local' and 'state' education.

Despite academies being a policy with a high political and media profile very little is actually known about how exactly actors working in local authorities and academies interpret the official policy's claims. This thesis contributes to the empirical gap in understandings of academies by specifically exploring how constructions of scale intersect with how actors implementing academies go about making sense of and react to the policy. The section which follows outlines the structure of the thesis to review how the research puzzle has been explored.

Structure of the Thesis

Chapter 2 sets the scene of the academies policy by exploring the policy context in which academies developed. England's education policy is described as being governed by a dual dynamic: the advance of market logic and the state exerting strong governance pressure; the academies policy is argued to reflect both these governance dynamics. The chapter also highlights how the policy has become a focal point for attempts to define education according to categories of scale: the policy claims that schools should become 'free' from local authority control, have greater individual autonomy, and that school accountability

should be overseen by the state. There is, however, very little understanding of how actors make sense of these scalar claims of the policy in their everyday work. Having introduced the academies policy the thesis subsequently turns to exploring the literature which has generated the overarching research puzzle.

Chapter 3 identifies and reviews the two bodies of literature which, when considered alongside each other, have given rise to the research puzzle. The first part of the chapter reviews the implementation studies literature from the disciplines of political science and public administration. Classic implementation studies are reviewed and their approach to policy is highlighted as being underpinned by scalar claims, for example referring to the 'top' or 'bottom' of the scalar hierarchy when trying to understand why there is a 'gap' between policy goals and outcomes. The chapter then reviews the critiques interpretive policy analysis scholars have made about classical implementation studies, highlighting how the former privilege policy meanings and the practices of those who engage with policy. The discussion argues that despite critically engaging with how actors make sense of and practice policy, interpretive approaches have yet to consider how actors rely on scalar categories as a way of making sense of their policy worlds.

The chapter then turns to review human geography debates around the concept of scale. This literature is considered to be an invaluable resource to underlining how scale has been approached uncritically in the study of policy. The first part of this section reviews political-economic geographers' approaches to scale, whose most significant contribution was to discuss the socially constructed nature of scale. The second part explores how post-structuralist geographers have further extended critical arguments about scale. This group of scholars has critiqued political-economic approaches for reifying scale by using it as an analytical category by which to explain the world. Post-structuralist geographers instead argue that scale is a 'category of practice' used by actors to understand their social worlds (Moore 2008). They therefore argue that closer attention needs to be placed on understanding the nature of actors' 'scalar practices' which refers to how categories of scale are used by actors to both interpret and strategically shape their realities.

The arguments made by post-structuralist human geographers are subsequently considered in relation to an interpretivist approach to policy, something which has led to the

development of the research puzzle. The puzzle identifies how interpretive studies of policy have failed to extend their critical approach to the concept of scale. In light of this, the puzzle also reflects on the potential for interpretive understandings of policy to be further developed by approaching scale as a category of practice. Chapter 3 concludes by outlining how the research puzzle will be explored by integrating an interpretivist approach to policy with the critical approach to scale proposed by post-structuralist geographers. The following research question is formulated in order to empirically explore the research puzzle: ‘what kinds of scalar practices do actors deploy during their policy work, and what kinds of politics are wrapped up in these practices?’

Having proposed a theoretical framework which points to the relevance of scalar practices in policy, Chapter 4 turns to addressing how I have explored this. The chapter outlines the project’s abductive research strategy and its interpretivist, relativist ontology. It describes how my approach shares the intellectual underpinnings of interpretive approaches to policy and how this focuses on what kinds of meaning are given to policies by the actors who engage with them which, in turn, is a position used as an entrance point for exploring ‘policy work’. The chapter also outlines how I specifically draw on the idea of scalar practice where the concept of ‘practice’ is specifically grounded in the work of post-structuralist human geographers. Interviews are identified as a valuable method to support this interpretive inquiry. The theoretical basis of the project’s case study design is then outlined before describing how I proceeded to choose two local authority case studies and four academies within each one. The way in which the academies policy has played out in the two chosen case studies – Northwestern and Eastshire – is then described. The chapter subsequently turns to issues around generating data, including justifying my choice of interviewees (local authority officers, academy principals, sponsors and chairs of governors), the interviewing process, and my reflections on the politics of interviews. The ethical considerations surrounding the project are then outlined before finally turning to reflect on the process of analysis and writing-up.

Chapters 5 and 6 present the main empirical findings generated from exploring the scalar practices deployed by actors during their policy work. Chapter 5 explores how actors consistently related their understandings of academies to a ‘national’ scale. By examining how this played out in Northwestern and Eastshire, this chapter highlights how actors

associate a wide range of meanings with the ‘national’ which varies both within and across the case studies. Chapter 6 presents how policy actors made sense of the academies policy in relation to the ‘individual academy’ and ‘local authority’ scales. The practices relating to both these scales are examined together because actors overwhelmingly defined and discussed these scales in a relational manner. In Northwestern, actors’ scalar practices constructed the academies policy in relation to the local authority scale, underlining that individual schools were nested within this. In the case of Eastshire, academies were defined as being an issue related to the individual school scale and their practices constructed a scalar boundary between schools and the local authority. Both Chapters 5 and 6 reveal how scalar practices were instrumental to how actors went about both making sense of academies and to how actors strategically attributed particular meanings to the policy.

Chapter 7 considers the insights that have emerged in the empirical findings and develops a theoretical approach which not only focuses on the scalar practices deployed by actors but also investigates what kinds of politics are reflected in these practices. I call this the practice of *scalecraft*. The chapter argues that the dominant practices of scalecraft in each case study can be understood as the product of actors mobilising three political concepts: the state, market and community. It then examines how each of these political concepts have played out in the practices of Northwestern and Eastshire policy actors.

In the concluding chapter, I outline the empirical and theoretical contributions the thesis has made through the pursuit of the research puzzle. It outlines what has been revealed about the nature of the academies policy and what theoretical contributions have been made to existing bodies of literature. The concept of scalecraft is discussed in depth as a new approach to the study of policy and scale before ending with some final suggestions for an agenda for future research.

CHAPTER 2

Setting the Scene: The Academies Policy and the Governance Dynamics of England's Education System

The themes presented in the Introduction are empirically explored in this thesis by focusing on England's academies policy. This chapter highlights how academies have become a focal point for struggles to define education in relation to particular scales and how the policy advocates a very distinct understanding of how schools should be governed. As a way of highlighting that the academies policy is conducive to pursuing the thesis' overarching interest in critically approaching scale in the study of policy, this chapter introduces the policy and places it in the context of wider governance shifts in England's schooling system. The discussion first outlines the chronology of policy reforms related to the increasing number of school models in England's education system. The diversifying schooling landscape is then located in the context of wider trends in education governance. The discussion will reveal how England's education policy landscape has been understood to involve the dominance of market logic as well as the state continuing to exert strong governing pressures. These dynamics, in turn, highlight how the policy is at the centre of struggles to represent education according to particular arguments about scale. As is the case in delineating any 'context' the discussion has constructed chronological and spatial boundaries around the policy context of academies. While these boundaries are justified by being considered most relevant to the focus of the thesis, it is essential to recognise that the context described below has been, and continues to be, affected by reforms and governance dynamics which lie outside the temporal and spatial dimensions of this discussion.

A Diversifying Schooling Landscape and the Development of an Education Market

The 1979-1997 Conservative Governments

The reforms introduced under the Conservative administrations between 1979 and 1997 are considered to have fundamentally restructured England's schooling system. Legislation passed in the 1988 Education Reform Act (ERA) arguably created the most radical and controversial policy changes of this period. Indeed, Chitty (2009: 51) comments that the ERA "attracted more bitter and widespread professional opposition than any piece of legislation passed since the introduction of the National Health Service in the second half of the 1940s". Today, the ERA is considered the starting point for creating a 'quasi-market' in England's school-based education (Le Grand and Bartlett 1993). This new quasi-market was created by placing emphasis on parental 'choice' regarding which school they should send their children to, a diversification of the types of schooling available, the publication of examination results and national test 'league tables,' and schools being encouraged to 'compete' to be at the top of the national hierarchy of schools.

In addition to this, ERA legislation allowed for the creation of new types of school – City Technology Colleges (CTCs) and grant-maintained schools – which are regarded as being particularly important to the eventual development of the academies policy. CTCs were originally announced in a 1986 speech by Kenneth Baker (the Secretary of State for education and science at the time) which stated that a pilot network of 20 CTCs would be created in disadvantaged urban areas (Walford 1990). These schools would cater for 11 to 18-year-olds and offer a curriculum which specifically focused on technology and business. CTCs involved private-sector sponsors setting up a company with charitable status which would run the school. Sponsors would either own or lease the schools and were expected to "meet the costs of buildings and equipment, or contribute a substantial part of those costs" (DES 1986: 6). The governing bodies of CTCs, which were dominated by industry representatives (Chitty 2009), were given unprecedented freedom to negotiate teacher salaries and the terms and conditions of their staff contracts. While they were classified as 'independent' schools, CTCs did not charge fees and the running costs of the schools were directly funded by central government according to the number of pupils in the school. West and Bailey (2013: 141) argue that the "funding structure of CTCs represented a

significant movement away from local authority control of schools” and an emphasis on autonomy and freedom to an unprecedented degree. While the CTC scheme developed to be relatively limited in its scope – by 1993 only 15 CTCs had been set up (Curtis *et al.* 2008) – Whitty and Edwards (1998: 218) have emphasised that the initiative can “be interpreted as providing a model for how autonomous schools might be funded, organised and operate in a market”. The latter principles would prove to be of instrumental importance to the development of academies in years to come.

The 1988 ERA also introduced ‘grant-maintained’ schools which were schools that “chose to opt out of the locally maintained education system and receive their funding direct from central government” (Chitty 2009: 52). This policy, once again, undermined the roles and responsibilities of local authorities and did so by emphasising the enhanced autonomy grant-maintained status would provide individual schools. In addition to the setting up of this new type of school ERA legislation introduced ‘Local Management of Schools’ (LMS). This involved a new funding formula whereby schools which chose to remain with their Local Education Authority and not gain grant-maintained status received funding according to the number of pupils enrolled. An essential principle of LMS was that schools could choose to spend this allocation in the way that they wished (Le Grand 1991). This emphasis on individual school choice and per pupil allocation of funding reflects why LMS is regarded as furthering the marketisation of schooling.

The 1992 White Paper *Choice and Diversity: A New Framework for Schools* (and the 1993 Education Act which legislated its proposals) had a key objective which was to increase the number of grant-maintained schools. The John Major Government at that time had been disappointed with the low number of schools opting for grant-maintained status and the “legislation diverted even more money away from LEAs [Local Education Authorities] into schools” (Whitty 2008: 168) to encourage a greater uptake of grant-maintained status. These reforms also encouraged the creation of ‘technology colleges’ which were schools specialising in technology, science and mathematics – institutions seeking to become technology colleges were only able to do so if they were grant-maintained. Technology colleges also had sponsors which were argued to “play a very positive role in helping schools to specialise in their preferred [curriculum] areas” (DfE 1992: 44). The CTCs were

referred to as being at ‘the centre’ of this network of specialist schools, with technology colleges framed as furthering the impact of the CTC scheme.

In 1995, the technology colleges scheme was extended to become the ‘specialist schools’ programme whereby schools could specialise in other subjects, such as modern languages and sport, and was open to all maintained schools. An important aspect of this was that “specialist schools were required to raise £100,000 of private-sector sponsorship towards the cost of a capital project to improve their facilities in the specialist area” (West and Bailey 2013: 142); schools successful in this endeavour became eligible for additional central government grants. By the end of the Conservative government’s term in 1997 there were 181 specialist schools and colleges in existence (Chitty 2009), all of which had some degree of private sector collaboration.

The 1997-2010 New Labour Governments

Following their landslide victory in the 1997 general election, the New Labour party came to power under the leadership of Tony Blair. A major change introduced at the beginning of the New Labour administration was that grant-maintained schools were abolished under the 1998 School Standards and Framework Act. Grant-maintained schools could either choose to re-join their LEA as ‘community schools’, become ‘voluntary-aided’ (those which had business or religious sponsors), or become foundation schools (all three types were classified as ‘maintained’ schools); the vast majority opted for foundation status. Foundation status meant that schools no longer received funding directly from central government and “received their budgets via the local authority and were subject to local authority supervision” (West and Bailey 2013: 143). Importantly, foundation schools differed from LEA-maintained ‘community schools’ by being able to employ their own staff and control their own admissions arrangements. Foundation schools’ governors or charitable trusts also owned the school buildings and land, unlike community schools which were owned by the LEA (Ball 2008). The governing bodies of all maintained schools were accountable to the local authority and regulated by the same legal framework (James 2012). Local authorities therefore had a greater role to play with maintained schools compared to schools with grant-maintained status.

From the beginning of the New Labour administration it was made clear that great emphasis would be placed on diversity as a necessary characteristic of the comprehensive education system. Further specialisation of maintained schools was seen as the best way of achieving this, which many commentators regard as a continuation of the policies which had been pursued by the preceding Conservative governments (Chitty 2009; Whitty 2008). The 1997 *Excellence in Schools* White Paper emphasised how specialist schools would “form a focal point for revitalising education” (DfEE 1997: 41) through “working together in local “families” [of schools] to help share the benefits across a number of schools” (*ibid*, p.40). There was thus a focus on sharing expertise and facilities with the ‘local community’ in New Labour’s re-launch of the specialist schools policy. The expected financial contribution of sponsors to specialist schools was decreased to £50,000 (for smaller schools this was £20,000) (House of Commons Education and Skills Committee 2003) and specialist schools continued to receive additional funds from central government, which often acted as an incentive for seeking specialist status (West *et al.* 2000).

The official launch of the academies policy came in 2000 when New Labour’s Secretary of State for Education and Employment, David Blunkett, gave a speech to the Social Market Foundation. Blunkett outlined how failing, inner-city secondary schools would be closed down and reopened as ‘City Academies’ which would help to improve pupil performance in areas of deprivation. The 2002 Education Act changed the name from ‘City Academies’ to ‘academies’ in order to include rural parts of the country, however, the focus remained on targeting educational *failure*. Academies would be run by external sponsors who would provide an initial £2 million investment (Gunter 2011). Sponsors would take on this role by creating a private company with charitable status which would then enter into a funding agreement with the Secretary of State for Education and Employment. Thus, similar to CTCs (and unlike maintained schools), academies would receive funding directly from central government (via legal contract). The key difference between academies and maintained schools was that the governing bodies of maintained schools were accountable to the local authority, which had the right to replace the governing body if the school was not performing well. Academies removed this accountability link with the local authority and the powers to intervene were instead given to the Secretary of State. This has been interpreted as “a ‘break’ from roles and structures and relationships of accountability of a state education system” (Ball 2007: 177).

When the academies policy was launched it was emphasised that academies would have “innovative approaches to management, governance, teaching and the curriculum” (Blunkett 2000: paragraph 42). Academy ‘freedoms’ were framed as being highly advantageous and initially academies did not need to adhere to the National Curriculum. However, in 2007 it became mandatory for academies to conform to the National Curriculum in core subjects. The 2007 and 2009 White Papers discussed individual school ‘freedoms’ in relation to academy, specialist and trust status as opposed to only relating freedoms to academies.

A major way that the academies programme was promoted was to combine it with *Building Schools for the Future* (BSF) bids. BSF was a programme which made capital investments in secondary school buildings across England. The Department for Education and Skills (DfES) (2004: 17) stated that academies “should form a key part of *Building Schools for the Future* plans” and that local plans for capital investment which were integrated with the use of academies would “be more likely to [...] progress quickly through project development to the final approval of funding”. The DfES also “encourage[d] LEAs to engage directly with potential Academy sponsors as part of the *Building Schools for the Future* preparation and evaluation” (*ibid*). By 2004 academies could also be new schools (not only replacements of pre-existing schools) in areas where there was a perceived shortage of school places, something which was a further incentive to combine academies with BSF funds. This approach by the government meant that local authorities had strong incentives to include academies in their plans for schools as this could result in them being rewarded with large capital investments from central government. The BSF programme has thus been regarded as “decisive in scaling up academies” (Adonis 2012: 108) during the early stages of the policy.

The 2005 White Paper, *Higher Standards, Better Schools for All: More choice for parents and students*, reflects how the academies programme was gaining significant momentum five years after it had been launched. The 2001 White Paper had stated that 20 academies would be set up by 2005; the 2005 White Paper stated that “by 2010, at least 200 will be open or in the pipeline” (DfES 2005: 29) and academies were described as playing “a vital role in the system” (*ibid*). The projected number of academies became 300 in the 2009 White Paper

(DCSF 2009). After a change in leadership in 2007 (when Gordon Brown became Prime Minister) government ambitions to diversify the schooling landscape continued, with the 2007 *Children's Plan* stating that “every secondary school [should be] working towards specialist, academy or [foundation] trust status” (DCSF 2007: 94). Further reforms in the later years of the New Labour administration included encouraging sponsors to create an endowment fund for “activities which will focus on countering the educational impact of disadvantage and deprivation; and/or for educational work with the local community” (DfES 2006: 6) and the removal of the requirement for sponsors to make financial contributions in 2009. By the end of New Labour's time in government in May 2010, the school landscape was significantly more diversified: 203 academies had been set up, all but three CTCs had converted to academies, and over 90% of schools had specialist status (House of Commons Library 2010).

The Post-2010 Coalition Government

The New Labour government was replaced by a Conservative-Liberal Democrat coalition in May 2010 and the new Secretary of State for Education, Michael Gove (a member of the Conservative Party), immediately made it clear that academies would be central to education reforms. The Conservative Party's election manifesto had clearly conveyed an ambition to make the academies programme more far-reaching than it had been during the New Labour years; it stated that “all existing schools will have the chance to achieve Academy status, with ‘outstanding’ schools pre-approved” (Conservative Party 2010: 53) and that the policy would be extended to primary schools. These ambitions came to fruition two months after the Coalition government came to power with the passing of the Academies Act, which allowed all schools in the country to be eligible for academy status. The conversion requirement for failing schools to have sponsors remained, yet successful schools (known as ‘converters’) did not require sponsorship. Although the Academies Act was passed by the Coalition government administration it is largely regarded as a Conservative party ambition; during the Liberal Democrat party conference in September 2010, a motion was passed to campaign against the reforms linked to the Academies Act.

The 2010 White Paper, *The Importance of Teaching*, was published four months after the Academies Act and this document reflected the striking shift from academies addressing ‘weaknesses’ in the education system to being an all-encompassing policy solution. For

example, the White Paper states: “It is our ambition that Academy status should be the norm for all state schools, with schools enjoying direct funding and full independence from central and local bureaucracy” (DfE 2010: 52). Between May 2010 and April 2011 schools which had been classified as ‘outstanding’ by Ofsted were the only schools which could apply to become ‘converter’ academies. According to the 2010 White Paper there was an immediate high level of interest in this, with “72 per cent of outstanding secondary schools and 22 per cent of outstanding primary schools” (*ibid*, p.54) contacting the Department for Education (DfE) to be sent information on the academy conversion process. After April 2011, schools which had received ‘good’ in their previous inspection reports could also apply to become converters.

In addition to this, a new type of academy called a ‘free school’ was also introduced via the Academies Act. In the case of free schools, “groups of parents, teachers or other sponsors can apply to start their own state-maintained but officially ‘independent’ schools” (Walford 2014: 9). These schools do not charge fees and have been framed as the solution to ‘parental demands’ for greater choice over available schools (DfE 2010). Free schools can either be completely new schools or a private school which chooses to become state-maintained (the latter cannot charge fees once they have free school status).

The Academies Act was put in place in a context of a major austerity programme. This, combined with the ending of the specialist schools programme, meant that schools’ budgets were under pressure. When the academies policy was first extended to high-performing schools in 2010, there were substantial financial gains to be made from converting to academy status. Schools were given a £25,000 grant to help with the legal costs involved in converting and had all their insurance costs covered by the state. To allow academies to buy the services they no longer received from their local authority, academies also received an extra grant called the LACSEG (Local Authority Central Spend Equivalent Grant) in addition to their normal grant (Downes 2011). The method by which the LACSEG was calculated in the first 19 months after the Academies Act resulted in the LACSEG being 60-70% more than the financial needs of schools converting to academies, resulting in a financial ‘bonus’ for these institutions. The actual amount of extra money schools could potentially receive from converting to an academy depended on the local area in which they were located and the size of the school (larger schools received a greater bonus) (*ibid*). From

April 2013, academy funding arrangements were reformed which led to the LACSEG being replaced by the 'Education Services Grant' and a subsequent decrease in the amount of funding being allocated to academies (DfE 2012). The existence of financial incentives during the first 19 months after the Academies Act has been supported by a survey conducted by Bassett *et al.* (2012: 4) which examined 478 schools that had converted to academies. The research found that 78% "chose to become an academy in part because of a perception that they would receive additional funding" and 39% "said this was the main reason for their conversion".

Despite the financial incentives related to academy status, the official narrative regarding academies argued that schools were attracted by the associated 'freedoms' on offer. For example, the 2010 White Paper argued that schools should be "free from central or local bureaucratic constraints" (DfE 2010: 11) and that the government's ambition was to "help every school which wishes to enjoy greater freedom to achieve Academy status" (*ibid*, p.12). Thus, academies were emphasised as being the primary route to greater school freedom to a much greater extent than was the case under New Labour, which had also emphasised other kinds of school providing 'freedoms'. This reflects the Conservative policy of pursuing the expansion of market freedoms by promoting academy status as being appropriate for all schools. There have been several changes to how academies have been regulated during this period. The Charity Commission regulated academies until August 2011 when the DfE became the main regulator to ensure academies (which became exempt charities) complied with charity and education law. This role was passed onto the 'Education Funding Agency' (EFA) in March 2012 which regulates academies on behalf of the DfE (Charities Commission 2012; West and Bailey 2013).

A significant part of the academies landscape is dominated by academy federations, commonly known as 'chains'. Chains involve one sponsor being responsible for more than one academy where the sponsor often uses the same 'model' (such as pedagogical methods and school philosophy) across all its academies. In 2008 there were 40 academy chains, with the two largest sponsoring 13 and five academies respectively (Hill *et al.* 2012). Academy chains were considered a great asset by the Coalition government and considered them to "free up schools from central bureaucracy" (Chapman 2013: 2). Following the passing of the Academies Act DfE brokers took an active role in matching 'underperforming' schools

with sponsors and did this by strongly preferring chain sponsors. This was among the major factors which led to a sharp rise in the number of academies in chains, and by 2012 there were 48 chains which consisted of three or more academies (Hill *et al.* 2012). The largest chain, the Academies Enterprise Trust, sponsors 77 academies. Collaborations between all schools, including converter academies, have also been strongly encouraged to take place both in terms of formal chains as well as informal support. This has been in response to the Coalition government's emphasis on improvement being the responsibility of schools rather than state agencies, which has resulted in calls for the development of a 'self-improving school system' where local school partnerships are set up to create a network of mutual support (Chapman 2013; Hargreaves 2010).

Today, a substantial proportion of England's state schools have now become academies, particularly in the secondary school sector. West and Bailey (2013: 154) argue that "the converter academy programme can be seen to be a means of effecting system-wide change by increasing the role of private bodies (academy trusts) in the delivery of school-based education" and thus represents a radical new development in the governance of education. Some of the latest figures released by the DfE indicate that over 55% of secondary schools are now academies (DfE 2014).

By outlining the emergence of the academies policy this discussion has highlighted the ways in which a 'quasi-market' has been created in England's schooling system (Le Grand and Bartlett 1993). One of the most powerful narratives which has underpinned the spread of market logic in England's education is that which promotes the pursuit of individual choice and self-interest. This involves parent 'consumers' seeking to maximise the interest of their children by exerting choice over which school to attend, as well as schools and senior managers ('producers') "making policy decisions that are based upon ensuring that their institutions thrive, or at least survive, in the marketplace" (Gewirtz *et al.* 1995: 2). With the number of academies continuing to rise, England's schooling landscape has been further fragmented, individualised, and governed by private bodies (academy trusts) – it appears that the dominance of market logic in education is set to become further entrenched.

Centralisation and State Governing Pressures

While the market dynamics discussed above could be interpreted as marking the retreat of the state, many authors however have understood this to involve an iterative relationship between market and state. A particularly important observation has been the somewhat paradoxical way in which “neoliberalisation [has] entailed the fragmentation or ‘agencification’ of the state (Pollitt *et al.* 2001) and often ‘governing at a distance’ (Rose and Miller 1992), [but] these changes have [also] often worked to increase centralised control” (Shore and Wright 2011: 15). Indeed, the development of the academies policy and creation of a ‘quasi-market’ in England’s education has taken place in a wider context of increased centralisation. The phenomenon of ‘governing at a distance’ refers to arguments that the state now uses governance technologies and tools which encourage certain behaviours and self-regulation rather than directly making demands of those it seeks to govern. Some of the key areas reflecting the increased centralisation of England’s schooling will now be briefly explored.

A key dynamic which has reflected the state continuing to play a key role in governing education has been the growth of centralised school data banks in England (see Ozga *et al.* (2011); Broadfoot (1996)). Since the 1980s there has been an increased focus on measuring attainment levels (of pupils, schools and the school system as a whole) through national testing as well as a focus on the process of setting national performance targets for ‘key stages’ of education. This increasing reliance on target setting, performance measurement and quality indicators has resulted in “the reassertion of central control” (Ozga *et al.* 2011: 108) and schools feeling increasingly governed by these data indicators. The 1988 ERA introduced a National Curriculum and changes to teacher training which, in turn, placed new restrictions on teachers’ freedom to exercise their professional judgement. Importantly, this standardisation of the curriculum and associated national assessments were complementary to the advance of market logic in education as they allowed parents to scrutinise and choose schools according to a comparable set of criteria (Whitty 2008).

The area of inspection is another key part of the process of schools increasingly becoming subject to central control and scrutiny (see Ozga *et al.* (2013), Baxter and Clarke (2013)). The 1992 Education (Schools) Act shifted the responsibility of most inspections from Her

Majesty's Inspectors and LEA inspectorate teams to independent inspection teams. The work of the latter was coordinated by the new non-ministerial department of state, the Office for Standards in Education (Ofsted) (Lee and Fitz 1997). The new handbook of inspection which accompanied these reforms outlined how inspectors would be recruited and how inspections would be carried out according to newly specified criteria. This undermined the professional judgments of inspectors who had traditionally focused on their interpretations of 'good practice' (*ibid*). Ofsted's programme of inspections meant that schools were inspected regularly and that results were subsequently published, which further supported the market logic of parental choice and the existence of a national hierarchy of schools. The Coalition government introduced further reforms which have produced "a new much tougher inspection framework that will operate in an increasingly competitive environment in which penalty for failure is even more severe" (Ozga *et al.* 2013: 215). This is exemplified by the replacement of the grade "satisfactory" with "requires improvement" (Ofsted 2012). This 'tougher' inspection judgement intersects with the narrative of academies being the solution to school failure; if a school falls into the category of "requires improvement" it is given one year to raise its performance to "good" otherwise it risks being forced to convert to an academy by the Secretary of State. Schools that receive "inadequate" in their Ofsted inspection can be forced to immediately take on academy status (Academies Act 2010, s4(1)(b)), which further exemplifies the control being exerted by the state.

An increase in state control has also been highlighted by the way in which the role and agency of local authorities has been consistently eroded since the ERA (Sharp 2002). The introduction of Local Management of Schools as part of the ERA (discussed previously in this Chapter) involved school management tasks shifting from LEAs to individual school governing bodies. The encouragement of schools to take on grant-maintained status also sought to undermine LEAs' role in schooling. During the same period, the set of LEA statutory functions relating to the curriculum were rendered largely irrelevant by the introduction of a National Curriculum. Additionally, the creation of Ofsted involved the removal of local authority funding which had previously related to LEA involvement in the school inspection process (Wilkins 2000). While grant-maintained status was abolished by New Labour and was something which subsequently re-integrated these schools under LEA funding arrangements and supervision, the role of LEAs continued to be eroded. New

Labour “sought a greater proportion of LEA funding to be delegated to schools and less to be retained for LEA support services” (Bache 2003: 305).

Academies have had a profound effect on this erosion of local authorities’ (no longer called LEAs since 2006) capacity in the area of education. The way in which academies receive funding from central government has meant that local authorities have experienced a significant cut to their budgets. This has been particularly pronounced since 2010 due to the Academies Act resulting in a high number of converter academies. Indeed, many local authorities which have high numbers of academies now have very limited resources to support schools (Mansell 2011). In addition, academies are no longer accountable to their local authority and therefore local authority officers’ right to support or intervene in schools that encounter problems has been removed. The power to intervene in academies is held exclusively by the Secretary of State, underlining how the academies policy has created a major shift in power towards the centre. There has recently been an indication that the DfE is struggling to cope with both the practical and financial pressures relating to a rapidly expanding number of academies being directly accountable to the state (Burns 2012). This has led to calls for the re-introduction of a ‘middle tier’ in the governance of schools which would serve as a mediating body between the state and individual academies. For example, DfE plans have recently been revealed which indicate that England may be split into “eight geographical regions separate from local councils, with the free schools and academies in each region supervised by a new body to be known as a Headteacher Board (HTB) and headed by a chancellor” (Adams and Mansell 2013: online).

To summarise, England’s education is understood as being governed in an increasingly centralised manner, with the state maintaining a key role. Instead of directives being given out by government departments and bureaucracies, the state has adopted the tools and techniques of evaluation, performance indicators, incentives and inspection to encourage particular policy directions over others. Importantly, it involves actors actively choosing certain options over others, something which can create the impression of the state ‘retreating’ from policy when in fact it continues to exert control under a different guise.

Summary

By exploring the reforms and governance dynamics related to the academies policy the discussion has highlighted how these are understood to involve the advance of market logic as well as the state exerting governing pressures. The following characterisation of the governance dynamics currently operating in England's education system is particularly fitting:

“the narrative is neither clear nor strong, overlaid as it is with the echoes of previous attempts to free the market and dismantle the state, while, at the same time, deregulatory initiatives are combined with strong re-regulation, justified in order to create the conditions of total freedom that are always just out of reach.”

Ozga *et al.* (2013: 210)

Thus, the promotion of choice, self-interest and producer-consumer relations in the market, together with the state shaping the policy environment through indirect governance mechanisms, are dual dynamics that not only exist in parallel to each other but are also complementary and mutually reinforcing. These dynamics can be understood to reflect how the academies policy is embedded in arguments about scale. Attempts to “free the market” (*ibid*) emphasise how schooling should be governed by actors operating at the individual school and household scale. Simultaneously, centralised governance pressures promote the idea that schools should be judged according to national trends and indicators.

This thesis seeks to understand how actors responsible for implementing the academies policy make sense of these attempts to define education according to arguments about scale. The Introduction highlighted how education is an arena where representational struggles over scale are a prominent dynamic. The academies policy is no exception to this; indeed, this chapter has shown how the policy's prevailing narrative is dominated by references to the vertical ordering of space and a logic that current responsibilities and relationships across different scales need to be reformed. Namely, it is directly aimed at undermining the role of the (‘middle tier’) local authority, enhancing the autonomy of individual (‘local’) schools, and increasing the accountability role of the (‘national’) state. How policy actors themselves have made sense of these scalar claims when they conduct policy work around academies is an issue which remains largely unknown.

Academies thus point to interesting questions about the relationship between policy and scale. However, it is only by reviewing and combining two key bodies of literature that the research puzzle of this thesis is brought more sharply into focus. The next chapter reviews the implementation studies literature and critical approaches to scale; these are subsequently combined to generate the research puzzle and develop an analytical framework which will guide the empirical study.

CHAPTER 3:

Bridging Implementation Studies and Critical Approaches to Scale

The previous chapter outlined how the academies policy narrative focuses on the idea that responsibilities and relationships should be re-ordered across the scalar hierarchy of individual schools, local authorities and the state. While this official policy narrative is clear, very little is known about how policy actors whose work involves interpreting the national policy and making decisions around academies actually make sense of the policy's scalar claims. Exploring the latter requires an analytical framework which can help the researcher develop an understanding of the work policy actors do as well as to engage critically with the concept of 'scale'. The two bodies of literature which have been identified as the most appropriate resources for exploring this are implementation studies from the political science and public administration disciplines and the human geography debates around critical approaches to scale. This chapter provides a review of these literatures before combining them with the aim to bring the research puzzle and overarching research question into sharper focus.

Implementation Studies in Political Science and Public Administration

Political science and public administration disciplines have a long tradition of being preoccupied with the process of 'policy implementation'. The discussion which follows will underline how issues of scale have been fundamental (albeit indirectly implied) in traditional implementation literature. The latter has demonstrated a historical preoccupation with the relationship between policy and scales of administration when attempting to understand policy processes. This focus thus makes the body of literature a useful resource through which to develop an understanding of how scale has been approached in studies of policy. While interpretivist rather than traditional approaches to implementation form the basis of the thesis' eventual theoretical framework, providing a full review of the development of implementation studies serves to illustrate how an interest in scale has been embedded in

political science and public administration disciplines but has nevertheless been consistently treated uncritically.

While there has been much research which has indirectly been interested in implementation without explicitly calling it so, existing reviews of traditional approaches to implementation studies identify three ‘generations’ of literature in which implementation is the central focus. The first generation models emerged during the 1970s in the US and demonstrated a concern over the extent to which major reforms made by federal government were being realised locally. The second generation of implementation studies was largely characterised by the ‘top-down’ versus ‘bottom-up’ debate and, beginning in the mid-1980s, the third generation of models sought to bring together the opposing arguments of this debate. The different generations of implementation studies will be reviewed in further detail in the discussion to follow, although these are not completely discrete from each other and overlap in terms of the time frame in which they developed and the authors involved. The arguments of several key authors of each generation will structure the discussion. While this necessarily means that the review excludes a number of relevant authors, focussing on the chosen authors and their work has also been supported by other reviews of the implementation literature (Barrett 2004; Hill and Hupe 2002; Pülzl and Treib 2007).

First Generation Models

The first generation models emerged during the 1970s in US research, arguably as a reaction to a concern over the extent to which major reform initiatives were effective. The work of Pressman and Wildavsky (1973) is widely acknowledged to have had an important impact on implementation studies and it is argued by many that their arguments contributed to the stimulation of future studies; many have branded them the ‘founding fathers’ of implementation research (Hill and Hupe 2002). When Michael Hargrove (1975) announced that ‘implementation’ was the “missing link” in scholarly studies of the policy process it further highlighted how there was a heightened interest in the concept during the 1970s. It is important to note, despite the tone of discovery suggested in Hargrove’s “missing link” argument, that the 1970s did not mark the ‘dawn’ of implementation. Hill and Hupe (2002) have attempted to challenge the simplistic implications of discussing the ‘first generation’ of implementation studies by demonstrating how similar concerns have been present well before this period. Woodrow Wilson’s 1887 essay, *The Study of Administration*, is an example

of an early preoccupation with implementation. Wilson tries to separate politics and administration as “he belonged to a school of political theorists and activists who saw political interference in the minutiae of administration as a source of inefficiency and corruption” (Hill and Hupe 2002: 29). Wilson thus expresses a classic implementation concern over which roles should be occupied by different actors in order to achieve policy goals; he also articulates a long-standing pre-occupation with the tension between ‘political’ and ‘administrative’ activities. Nevertheless, it is clear that the 1970s did mark a distinct shift in that the concept of implementation received direct and new attention from the public administration and political science scholarly communities.

Second Generation Models: top-down versus bottom-up

It is widely agreed that one of the fiercest debates relating to studies of implementation have centred around the ‘top-down’ versus ‘bottom-up’ approaches (Barrett 2004; Hill and Hupe 2002; Schofield 2001) and that the tensions between these two positions characterise the second generation of implementation studies. The debate can be outlined as followed: on the one hand, top-down approaches understand implementation as “the hierarchical execution of centrally-defined policy intentions” (Pülzl and Treib 2007: 89) and, on the other hand, bottom-down scholars argue that implementation is about the strategies and routines of ‘street-level’ workers (Lipsky 1971; 1980). This debate was particularly polarised in the 1980s when implementation authors were focused on siding with either of the two ‘camps’ and subsequently criticising the opposing side. The key arguments of the top-down and bottom-up approaches will be outlined before moving onto the third generation of implementation studies and their efforts to reconcile the two.

Top-down Approaches

At the basis of the ‘top-down’ approach to the study of implementation is the clear separation between policy formulation and implementation. The top-down approach is effectively summarised by Susan Barrett who describes its following assumptions:

“Policy, once formulated and legitimated at the ‘top’ or centre, is handed in to the administrative system for execution, and successively refined and translated into operating instructions as it moves down the hierarchy to operatives at the ‘bottom’ of the pyramid.”

(Barrett 2004: 252)

Top-down approaches can be understood as the by-product of the rationalist public administration model which is built on the assumption that policy and public administration are clearly distinct and that a variety of control measures are able to keep policy actors' discretion to a minimum (Schofield 2001). According to top-down approaches, the role of implementation studies is to identify the variables which cause implementation failures and to make recommendations about how the 'top' can best create the conditions for policy objectives to be achieved to the highest degree possible.

To return to the work of Pressman and Wildavsky (1973), it is generally regarded that the approach of the first edition of their work *Implementation* adopted a top-down perspective and this provided some guiding principles for many subsequent studies. They started with the assumption that the 'centre' develops policy objectives and that implementation is therefore the process of putting these objectives into practice. They argue, "[a] verb like 'implement' must have an object like 'policy' [...] policies normally contain both goals and the means for achieving them" (preface to the first edition, reprinted in the third edition, 1984, p.xxi). Thus, implementation is seen as the process clearly distinguishable from policy that has been officially set-out at the 'top'. The authors focus on the notion of an 'implementation deficit' and argue that the size of this – and, in turn, the degree to which implementation is a 'success' – is dependent on the number of links that exist between organisations and departments operating at the local level. These arguments are developed in the context of a study in Oakland, California where the authors followed the implementation processes associated with a federal policy of economic development. Pressman and Wildavsky use mathematical analysis to argue that local co-operation needs to be close to 100 per cent otherwise a large implementation gap can be created by the cumulative effect of several small linkage deficits. Their model takes on a 'rational' approach in that they understand policy as the setting of goals and then study implementation in terms of considering what makes the realisation of these goals difficult. In a second edition of the book following Pressman's death, Wildavsky began to doubt this model and instead, along with Angela Browne, developed the concept of policy formation and implementation being an interactive process and understood implementation as a process involving learning and adaptation (for example, see Browne and Wildavsky (1983)).

The work by Donald van Meter and Carl van Horn (1975) built on the work of Pressman and Wildavsky's first edition of *Implementation* to adopt a similarly top-down approach in their exploration of whether the goals set out during the formulation of policy are actualised during implementation. Unlike Pressman and Wildavsky however, van Meter and van Horn focus exclusively on the theorisation of this process. This theoretical perspective involved the development of a model where the outcome of implementation – 'performance' – is linked to six key variables. Most of these variables relate to hierarchical control and organisational capacity, however Pülzl and Treib (2007) argue that two of these variables are different to the 'mainstream' top-down stance. The extent of policy change is said to have an impact on how likely it is for effective implementation to take place as does the degree to which there is consensus between actors over goals. In light of this, the authors argue that the centre is unable to completely control how policy is locally implemented.

Another American scholar, Eugene Bardach (1977) was a notable top-down author in that his primary focus was to advise policy-makers on how to create the conditions of effective implementation. His book entitled *The Implementation Game* argues how implementation needs to be understood as a series of 'games'. His advice to policy-makers is thus to focus very closely on the 'scenario-writing' process in order for the subsequent implementation games to be played out in the most desired manner. Thus, Bardach promotes the argument that the 'top' must follow-through policy all the way to its implementation at the 'bottom'.

In a similar fashion to other top-down authors, the work of Sabatier and Mazmanian (1979; 1980) uses a governmental policy decision as its starting point. Clearly separating policy formulation from implementation, the authors list six factors which will lead to effective implementation. These are: (1) clear and consistent policy objectives, (2) a programme that is based on "a sound theory identifying the principal factors and causal linkages affecting policy objectives" (Sabatier and Mazmanian 1980: 554), (3) an implementation process which is structured so that target groups will perform as desired, (4) leadership of the implementation process which is committed to policy goals, (5) implementation that has the support of interest groups, executives and legislators, and, (6) policy goals which are not undermined by future developments in public policy or socio-economic conditions. The authors therefore focus on identifying key variables that need to be controlled by the top in order to secure the most effective conditions for implementation.

Bottom-up Approaches

During the 1970s and 1980s a different type of implementation study began to emerge – the ‘bottom-up’ approach – which partly developed as a critical response to the arguments made by top-down authors. Criticisms of top-down approaches included: neglecting the role of political rhetoric in shaping the formulation of policy, excluding ‘street-level bureaucrats’ as *active interpreters* of policy (Lipsky 1971; 1980), and not engaging with the ‘messiness’ of implementing policy. Outlining the work of several key authors will illustrate how the ‘bottom-up’ alternative attempted to address these perceived shortcomings of top-down approaches.

Michael Lipsky’s analysis of the behaviour of public service workers, which he called ‘street-level bureaucrats’ has made highly significant contributions to implementation studies. Indeed, his arguments were to form the building blocks for the many bottom-up authors of subsequent years. He first presented his work in an article in 1971 which was then followed by his widely-known book, *Street Level Bureaucracy: dilemmas of the individual in public services*, in 1980. Hill and Hupe (2002: 51) argue that Lipsky has often been misrepresented “simply as the writer who demonstrates how difficult it is to control the activities of street-level bureaucrats”. Indeed, if this was the case then Lipsky could be understood as providing supporting evidence for the recommendations of top-down approaches which support limiting the capacity of public servants in the delivery of policy as much as possible. However, Lipsky’s argument is far more subtle and, many would argue, innovative than this. He describes the routines and behaviours of street-level bureaucrats to argue that they, “effectively become the public policies they carry out” (Lipsky 1980: xii), but goes further to explain how work pressures force them to develop habits of processing people in an impersonal, stereotyped way. Street-level bureaucrats are understood by Lipsky as “develop[ing] conceptions of their work and of their clients that narrow the gap between their personal and work limitations and the service ideal” (*ibid*). Thus, street-level work involves being forced to operate within the structural and resource limitations of a system and yet simultaneously entails individual discretion and freedom over how exactly to cope with these pressures. The implications of Lipsky’s work for studies of implementation were grave. Unlike top-down studies which seek to understand implementation through the ‘policy input’, Lipsky illustrates that starting with what is being experienced by street-level bureaucrats is of greater significance. In addition, Lipsky demonstrates how attempts to

hierarchically control public service workers leads to them interacting with clients in a routine, stereotyped manner, which frames centralised control as an undesirable mechanism for both street-level bureaucrats and the citizens they serve.

Using Lipsky's work to support his argument, Richard Elmore (1980) was one of the first authors to suggest a methodological stance which would come to characterise many bottom-up approaches. Elmore argued that there had been a disproportionate emphasis on what he called 'forward-mapping' in studies of implementation. This forward-mapping refers to the top-down approach of starting with the formulation of policy and moving chronologically 'forward' to the process of implementation at the level of policy recipients. Instead, Elmore calls for a 'backward-mapping' of implementation where the analyst's starting point is the 'lowest level' (that of the street-bureaucrat) in the process of addressing a policy problem. He summarises the next step of analysis in the following way:

“Having established a relatively precise target at the lowest level of the system, the analysis backs up through the structure of implementing agencies, asking at each level two questions: What is the ability of this unit to affect the behaviour that is the target of the policy? And what resources does this unit require in order to have that effect?”

(Elmore 1980: 604)

Finally, Elmore's analysis can then identify a policy which is having the greatest effect on the street-level work identified at the start. By suggesting this methodology as an alternative to the top-down approach of forward-mapping Elmore's work was part of the critical shift of promoting a bottom-up approach to the study of implementation.

The work of Swedish scholar Hjern, and especially the collaborations with his colleagues Porter and Hull, further developed the bottom-up approach. Hjern and Porter's (1981) work argues that the experiences of street-level workers can neither be fully understood through organisational models of hierarchical control nor exclusively by individual incentive theories from economics. Thus, they went about constructing an alternative methodology for implementation inquiries. Arguing that “[p]rogrammes are implemented by clusters of parts of public and private organisations” (*ibid*, p.211), Hjern and Porter suggest that analysts should empirically construct the networks within which street-level workers operate without holding predetermined assumptions about what these relevant structures and

organisations are. The authors argue that these ‘implementation structures’ are a way of bridging the gap between organisational and individual incentive models of street-level behaviour. Hjern’s later work, which he carried out with Hull in 1987, also closely examines networks by identifying actors involved in the problem being addressed by a policy and then subsequently mapping the relations between them. The latter work helped to shed light on the role local networks can have on how the implementation process plays out (Hull and Hjern 1987).

Finally, Susan Barrett and Colin Fudge were two British scholars who also contributed to the ‘bottom-up’ implementation debate, most notably through their edited book *Policy and Action* (1981). They support Hjern and his colleagues’ work and similarly challenge the hierarchical assumptions of how the implementation process takes place. According to Barrett and Fudge, ‘policy’ and ‘action’ are inextricably linked: “[policy] is mediated by actors who may be operating with different assumptive worlds from those formulating the policy, and, inevitably, it undergoes interpretation and modification and, in some cases, subversion” (S. M. Barrett and Fudge 1981: 251). Thus, policy is something that is constantly being re-shaped and therefore the authors argue – in contrast to top-down approaches – that it is impossible to create a clear boundary between policy formulation and implementation.

Bottom-up approaches have been subjected to a number of criticisms. Top-downers have been critical of how bottom-up approaches have not provided policy actors with specific recommendations in light of their explanations of the implementation process. In addition, some have stated that the bottom-up argument about the impossibility of clearly separating policy formation from implementation means that there are methodological difficulties – such as being unable to set limits for a study – which have been left unaccounted for (Hill and Hupe 2002). Sabatier (1986) perceives three weaknesses in bottom-up research. Firstly, he argues that it often over-emphasises “the ability of the Periphery to frustrate the Centre” (Sabatier 1986: 34) and the structural limitations the centre can put in place to limit the individual discretion of actors. Secondly, Sabatier argues that the focus of studies such as those by Hjern and his colleagues do not consider policy developments that have taken place in the past and hence overlook the influence of previous and possibly different street-level actors in the development of a network. Finally, Sabatier argues that bottom-up

approaches are the ‘prisoners’ of the perceptions and activities of street-level workers and their conceptual standpoint does not allow them to consider the social, economic and legal factors which structure the experiences of street-level work. A further critical comment has been made by Schofield (2001: 251) in his suggestion that bottom-uppers have failed “to recognise that central actors and central policy are in themselves contingent factors to the local situation: a simple reversal of the top-down logic.”

Susan Barrett (2004) reflects on the top-down / bottom-up debates of the 1980s and notes that they raised several key questions. The most important of these are, firstly, ‘what are implementation studies trying to do?’ and, secondly, ‘what is meant by implementation?’ In terms of the former question, the purpose of top-down approaches can largely be argued as being prescriptive about what conditions need to be in place in order for implementation to most closely reflect policy-makers’ goals. On the other hand, bottom-up approaches argue that the main reason to study implementation is to understand and explain the complex processes involved, particularly in street-level work. Unsurprisingly, each camp argues that its strengths are the other’s weakness. Turning to the question of what the nature of ‘implementation’ is, it seems that this is a dilemma about whether it is about conformance or performance (Barrett 1981). Top-down approaches express a normative view regarding what is the most desirable outcome for implementation, namely, a high degree of *conformance* with the goals set out at the stage of policy formation. Thus, the nature of implementation for top-downers has the formulation and implementation separation at its core and focuses on the extent to which policy is implemented ‘accurately’. For the bottom-down approaches, there is also a normative stance adopted in that the discretion of street-level workers is not seen as negative. For this approach, implementation is more about *performance* in terms of what is possible to be achieved in a particular policy environment and who the winners and losers are in this process (Barrett 2004).

Third Generation Models: hybrid theories

Instead of either choosing to adopt a top-down or bottom-up approach some authors attempted to synthesise these two sides of the debate. Richard Elmore (1985), previously discussed as adopting a bottom-up approach, attempted to combine ‘forward-mapping’ with his original ‘backward-mapping’ concept in later work by arguing that both are important to the success of a policy. Thus, he proposes that policy-makers should first consider the

policy instruments they are employing (forward-mapping) and subsequently also examine the incentive structures of street-level actors (backward-mapping).

Paul Sabatier is another author who shifted away from the top-down/bottom-up dualism to suggest that the previous top-down approach he had developed with Mazmanian needed to be reformed. He argued that implementation studies needed to adopt the same starting point as bottom-up approaches and examine “a whole variety of public and private actors involved with a policy problem” (Sabatier 1986: 39) and the perspectives and strategies of these actors. Sabatier put forward an ‘advocacy coalition framework’ (which he later developed further with Jenkins-Smith (Sabatier and Jenkins-Smith 1993)). This rejects understanding policy as a stage-like process and instead places emphasis on understanding a more holistic process of policy change by the ‘advocacy coalition’ comprising actors from all legislative layers.

The self-proclaimed founding fathers of the ‘third generation’ of implementation studies, Goggin and his colleagues (1990), also attempted to bridge the divide between top-down and bottom-up debates. Goggin *et al.* (1990) criticise second generation studies as failing to develop theory of a strongly testable or explanatory nature. Through the development of their ‘Communication Model of Inter-Governmental Policy Implementation’, Goggin *et al.*’s work aims to introduce a “more scientific approach” (*ibid*, p.64) to the study of implementation. They constructed a theoretical model which emphasises the communication aspect of implementation. It explores what affects the acceptance or rejection of messages which travelled between different layers of government. The model is heavily North American based, with a focus on the movement of messages between state, federal and local legislative layers. Goggin *et al.* generate a large number of elaborate hypotheses in relation to this model which included seeking to establish causal relationships between the behaviour of implementation actors and policy outcomes. Hill and Hupe (2002) interpret this as Goggin *et al.* “struggling with the tension between a need to satisfy the practical demand for propositions about implementation success or failure and the complex nature of the phenomena with which they are concerned” (Hill and Hupe 2002: 65). Thus, one could argue that the tensions between the analytical focus and aims of top-down and bottom-up approaches are persistent within the models which seek to combine them. Indeed, this argument has been elaborated on by Parsons who has asserted that trying

to synthesise both models is like trying to combine “incommensurate paradigms” (1995: 487) due to the fundamental differences between them.

In their review of theories of implementation Pülzl and Treib (2007: 97) argue that the theoretical approaches of top-down, bottom-up and hybrid theories “share a common positivist worldview in terms of ontology and epistemology”. They argue that a new approach to implementation – that of interpretive analysis – holds great potential for developing new insights into policy.

Interpretive Approaches to Implementation

The ‘interpretive turn’ in policy implementation approaches departs from the underlying ontology and principles of traditional approaches to implementation by calling for an end to analyses which seek to provide the ‘right answers’ (Dunn 1981). Its relativist ontology considers the quest for universal truth to be futile as the world can only be understood through interpretation and meaning-making processes which are fundamentally unstable over time and space. From an interpretive perspective, “multiple meanings and multiple interpretations are anticipated as the norm rather than the aberrant exception” (Yanow 1993: 55). This is not something that can be ‘corrected’ by employing more specific or less ambiguous policy language, instead, ambiguity and multivocality define the very nature of language and communication. Thus, from an interpretive perspective, the study of policy implementation is explored with the assumption that multiple meanings and interpretations are the driving forces behind its associated processes, with the task of analysis being to identify and understand the nature of these multiple interpretations (*ibid*). Interpretive approaches shift the focus of implementation studies away from the ‘gap’ between policy goals and outcomes to the question famously posed by Dvora Yanow (1996): ‘how does a policy mean?’ This question underlines that an interpretive analysis of implementation will involve exploring how policy is interpreted, how policy actors create meaning through their work practices, and how actors ‘experience’ the effects of policy.

Pülzl and Treib (2007) note how the separation of policy formulation from implementation is something which is seen as untenable by interpretivists. On the contrary, interpretivists assume “that prior debates and policy meanings have an impact on policy execution as they influence implementers’ understanding of the problem” (*ibid*, p. 100). Due to the process of

policy formulation being characterised by multiple and sometimes contradicting interests, this means that implementing actors are also confronted with multiple meanings related to 'policy objectives'. Yanow's (1996) work contributes to this issue by arguing that policy actors need to accommodate for both explicitly stated policy goals as well as tacitly stated directives, which she calls 'verboden goals'. The challenge of an interpretive approach to implementation is to understand what struggles over meaning are taking place and to examine how and why these meanings are being conveyed in particular ways by a variety of policy actors and agencies.

Importantly, interpretive studies take great care to understand the specific context in which their empirical inquiries are embedded. Thus, implementation can only be analysed through focusing on the context in which a particular instance of implementation is taking place. And while this context-specific study can expose important features of what the process of implementation involves, any resultant theoretical insight or framework cannot "generate specific strategies, tactics, [and] skills to be used independently of specific contexts" (Forester 1993: 125) as meanings are always tied to the particular time and place of their construction.

Implementation Studies and Issues of Scale

I argue that the implementation studies literature would be enriched by the insights which have been developed in the discipline of human geography and specifically by the latter's critical engagement with 'scale'. The concept of scale which is used here refers to the perceived vertical ordering of the social world which is given labels such as the 'local', 'national' and 'global', as opposed to scale being used to describe the size or horizontal scope of space. What is striking about the implementation studies literature reviewed in this chapter is how scale is a concept which is instrumental to how authors have attempted to understand policy. For example, the top-down/bottom-up debate is clearly built on a hierarchical ordering of political space, with the effects of actions at the 'top' and 'bottom' influencing the outcome of implementation. Further unpacking the categories of 'top' and 'bottom' reveals a preoccupation with, on the one hand, the role and influence of 'the state' and its policy-formulating institutions and, on the other hand, the agency of implementers at the 'local' or 'street' level. Indeed, a close look at the title of Pressman and Wildavsky's

original work³ reveals a direct suggestion that the ‘problem’ of implementation is due to Washington’s expectations being of a ‘national’ nature and Oakland operating at a different scale to this; according to the authors, the larger the number of scales a policy needs to pass through, the greater the implementation ‘deficit’. Pressman and Wildavsky’s national/local juxtaposition has been shown to be alive and well, for example, as demonstrated in a recently published article by Exworthy *et al.* (2002) entitled, ‘How Great Expectations in Westminster May Be Dashed Locally.’

Some of the most recent work on implementation by Hill and Hupe (2002; 2003) has dedicated much attention to what they call the ‘multi-layer problem’. The latter refers to the fact that policy implementation often deals with multiple ‘layers’ of political administration, such as ‘national’, ‘regional’ and ‘local’, which makes it a highly complex process for an analyst to understand and to delineate where policy formulation ‘ends’ and implementation ‘begins’. This enduring preoccupation with a scalar hierarchy in political administration helps to demonstrate how scale is at the very foundations of how both researchers and policy actors think about and perform ‘implementation’.

Finally, implementation studies also demonstrate a long-standing interest in understanding how different scales relate to each other. For example, van Meter and van Horn’s (1975) work displays an interest in the limited ability of ‘the centre’ to control policy implementation at more local scales. Lipsky’s (1980) work argued that a high degree of centralised control over street-level workers was not necessarily a recommended approach to policy. Sabatier’s (1986) critique of bottom-up approaches focused on critiquing the degree to which street-level implementers were given individual discretion within the structural limitations imposed on them by ‘the centre’. Thus, the construction of a scaled, hierarchical governance structure and the relations and struggles over control which take place between different parts of this scalar hierarchy are concepts which are at the core of the implementation literature.

³ The complete title of their book is: *Implementation: How Great Expectations in Washington Are Dashed in Oakland; Or, Why It’s Amazing that Federal Programs Work at All, This Being a Saga of the Economic Development Administration as Told by Two Sympathetic Observers Who Seek to Build Morals on a Foundation of Ruined Hopes.*

Although interpretive critiques of classic approaches to implementation have highlighted the importance of understanding meaning-making processes, representations and practices involved in policy, this analytical lens has failed to include a critical approach to the concept of scale. Policy studies, including those related to IPA, thus continue to explain the world through its hierarchical, scaled ordering and the way policy works within this, rather than exploring how representations of scale feature in the implementation of policy. It is with this concern that the discussion will now turn to reviewing the critical approaches to scale proposed by human geographers. It is argued that this literature holds great potential to make original contributions to the field of interpretive approaches to implementation and thus generate new insights into studies of policy.

Critical Approaches to Scale in Human Geography

Human geography is a discipline which demonstrates a long tradition of critically engaging with the concept and categories of 'scale'. Debates around how geographers ought to conceptualise scale have resulted in a close critical engagement with how understandings of categories such as the 'local' and 'national' operate in the social world. The focus of most geographical inquiries into scale relates to a general interest in what geographers call 'socio-spatial' dynamics. The latter can most simply be described as an interest in how social phenomena are inextricably linked to the construction and use of space, which is one of the fundamental foci of geographical inquiry. This is not to claim that other disciplines do not engage with this theme or provide important insights into these questions. However, it is geographers' direct critical engagement with issues of socio-spatiality which, I would argue, makes their contributions to this field distinct from those of other disciplines. I will return to this argument later but it is first necessary for the discussion to review the geographical literature on scale. This literature can be divided into two categories: political-economic and post-structuralist approaches to scale.

Political-economic Approaches to Scale

The 1980s and 1990s witnessed a growing interest within political-economic approaches in human geography which related to understanding scale as a social construction. This approach emerged from the Marxist project pursued by authors such as David Harvey (1982). Harvey investigated the social production of space under a capitalist system and the

social inequalities associated with it. An interest in understanding how global, national, regional and local relations were being restructured through the apparent retreat of the state was at the heart of geographers' 'turn to scale' at this time. The perspectives of political-economic geographers served to underline how scales and hierarchies are not pre-existing platforms which shape human activities but that they are instead socially constructed instruments of power.

It is largely accepted that the most influential early attempt to theorise scale within the political-economic tradition was made in Peter Taylor's (1982) work. By reworking Immanuel Wallerstein's (1974a) world systems theory Taylor created a new 'political economy of scale' typology. Wallerstein's world systems theory asserts that the world economy is divided into three spatial structures: core, periphery and semi-periphery. According to Wallerstein, the function of the latter category "means precisely that the upper stratum is not faced with unified opposition of all the others" (Wallerstein 1974b: 405) and thus the semi-periphery plays a largely political role in managing the world economy. Taylor added three additional spatial categories to Wallerstein's model: the world-economy, the nation-state and the urban. Thus, people's lives are argued to be shaped by these different levels of scale, and simultaneously by the relative position they occupy in the world economy. The addition of the trinity of scales was argued by Taylor to be instrumental to the accumulation of capital and he therefore treated "them as ontological givens in a capitalist world economy" (Howitt 2002; Moore 2008: 208). Thus, scales were regarded as essential categories to employ in the analysis of space and they had causal effects on the practices of global capitalism.

Taylor's work helped to inspire a further critical investigation of scale in human geography, and Neil Smith's work is considered particularly seminal in its engagement with the concept of scale. Smith (1984) made his first theoretical contribution to understandings of scale in his work entitled *Uneven Development*, which presented Marxist arguments about how the conditions of capitalism produce highly uneven geographical configurations. His subsequent work developed the idea of the 'politics of scale' where Smith (1992: 66) argued that "it is geographical scale that defines the boundaries and bounds the identities around which control is exerted and contested". The relational nature of dynamics between different categories of scale (such as the national and local) is at the heart of Smith's politics of scale

approach, something which his concepts of ‘scale jumping’ and ‘scale bending’ particularly highlight. ‘Scale jumping’ is used to describe the movement of particular social actors, groups or organisations to ‘higher’ levels of scalar activity (such as from the local to the national) in order to pursue their interests (Smith 1993). ‘Scale bending’ is a related activity to this and refers to how particular actors or groups are able to challenge and destabilise the existing status quo by associating particular social activities with certain scales. Smith (2004: 201) has argued that an “eruption of scale bending incidents and events” during the 1980s and 1990s reflects how this period has been characterised by scale reorganisation related to processes of globalisation.

Eric Swyngedouw has been another influential contributor to political-economic approaches to scale. Building on the work of Smith, Swyngedouw adopts a relational conceptualisation of scale. In other words, scale is understood to be constructed from wider processes such as state regulation. This process-based view gives priority to “the process through which particular scales become (re)constituted” (Swyngedouw 1997: 141) and rejects using ‘the local’ or ‘global’ as a starting point of analysis. Swyngedouw also builds on the politics of scale concept by arguing that the reconfiguration of scales “embodies and expresses power relationships” (*ibid*, p.140) and he uses Smith’s notion of ‘scale jumping’ to discuss scalar dynamics. Thus, the socially constructed nature of scale is further developed, with Swyngedouw arguing that ‘scalar configurations’ are neither completely local nor completely global but are instead nested in each other in a networked manner. However, the verticality of scale formation remains, with local-national-global hierarchies being a guiding principle for Swyngedouw’s understanding of political economic processes.

Understandings of the politics of scale have also been significantly progressed by the writings of Kevin Cox (1998). Cox’s work proposes that a distinction should be made between what he calls ‘spaces of dependence’ and ‘spaces of engagement’. Spaces of dependence are described as “those more-or-less localized social relations upon which we depend for the realization of essential interests and for which there are no substitutes elsewhere” (*ibid*, p.2). The ‘place-specific’ spaces of dependence are simultaneously embedded in a broader set of relationships of a global nature. Cox argues that these global dynamics “constantly threaten to undermine or dissolve” (*ibid*) spaces of dependence. In response to this, people, firms or state agencies operate in a way that attempts to protect

their spaces of dependence. To achieve this, actors need to engage with alternative centres of social power such as local government or the national press. The latter strategy leads to the construction of a different form of space: a 'space of engagement'. The dynamics that take place between spaces of dependence and engagement are an attempt by Cox to develop understandings of the politics of scale. Also, Cox demonstrates in this work how the 'scale jumping' phenomenon described by Smith does not necessarily entail a unidirectional movement of actors from 'lower' levels of political scale to 'higher' ones and that this is instead a far more iterative process.

Neil Brenner's (2001) theory of 'scalar structuration' is also part of the political-economic tradition. He proposes that the movement of capital can be understood through his concept of scalar structuration, which refers to "relations of hierarchization and rehierarchization among vertically differentiated spatial units" (*ibid*, p.603). Brenner argues that the movements of capital involve the temporary creation of scalar reference points to which capital can associate itself with. Scalar structuration particularly focuses on the historical production and transformation of scales and is based on several propositions. MacKinnon (2010) has filtered Brenner's key arguments into five central points. Firstly, scales are not an inherent property of space but they are instead produced by wider 'sociospatial processes' such as capitalist production and state regulation. Secondly, scales should be understood as relational and therefore an analysis of them needs to focus on the 'vertical' relationships between scales – such as between local and national – as opposed to more 'horizontal' relations. Brenner argues that the concept of scale suffers from 'analytical blunting' largely due to geographers framing their research in scale terms when they should instead be discussing place-making, localisation or territorialisation – in other words, the politics of scale only relates to hierarchical orderings between scales. Thirdly, a key proposition made by Brenner is that scalar relations "do not produce a single nested scalar hierarchy, an absolute pyramid of neatly interlocking scales, but are better understood as a mosaic of unevenly superimposed and densely interlayered scalar geometries" (*ibid*, p.606) – a similar argument to that made in Swyngedouw and Cox's work. Fourthly, the process of scalar structuration continuously produces temporary 'scalar fixes' which frame everyday social activities and this comes about through the production of hierarchical structures of organisation. The final key point made by Brenner relates to the path-dependent nature of scalar structures. This path-dependency occurs through the interaction between historical,

inherited scale constructions and emergent projects and strategies which attempt to reorganise these inherited arrangements. The latter point is instrumental to Brenner's focus on understanding the historical transformation of scale by examining hierarchical relations between scales.

This brief overview of political-economic geographers' approach to scale has demonstrated that they focus on four key arguments. Firstly, scales are socially constructed as opposed to pre-existing, stable structures in the world. Secondly, scales are understood relationally and as being nested within each other. Thirdly, political-economic approaches focus on the vertical, hierarchical structure of scales. Finally, it is argued that there is a 'politics of scale' which involves scales being strategically used for political purposes, something which has been explained by concepts such as 'scale jumping'.

Post-structuralist Critiques

The political-economic approaches to scale have been subject to a range of criticisms from geographers both within and outside the political-economic field. Since the 2000s, post-structuralists have used these criticisms as the basis for proposing an alternative approach to scale. The main criticisms of the political-economic approach will first be outlined in the discussion before proceeding to the alternative approaches proposed by post-structuralists.

One key critique of the way scale has been used in the 1990s was originally stated in Andrew Jonas' (1994) work which discussed how there has been a conflation of abstract and metaphorical uses of scale. He argues that on the one hand scales are used as naturalised abstractions, as fixed 'givens' that "have come to be seen as things in themselves to be dealt with categorically" (Howitt 1998: 50). On the other hand, a wide range of metaphorical representations of scale are utilised as a way of discussing socio-spatial politics. For example, Swyngedouw (2004) uses the scalar category of 'the local' to describe communities being affected by globalisation and Brenner (1999) uses it to refer to the 'ladder' and 'scaffolding' structures which he argues underpin capitalist systems (Moore 2008). This arguably unreflexive use of abstract and metaphorical scale categories can lead to a form of 'spatial fetishism' (Sayer 1985) where space itself – and the scalar categories we assign to it – is given causal agency independent of social structures.

In his review of the political-economic literature on scale MacKinnon (2010) argues that there is a tension between fluidity and fixity. Authors such as Swyngedouw (1997: 141) emphasise that “[s]patial scales are never fixed, but are perpetually redefined, contested and restructured in terms of their extent, content, relative importance and interrelations”. On the other hand, the literature continues to discuss scales in such a way that suggests that they have a ‘material existence’. For example, Smith (2003: 228) describes scales as “materially real frames of social action [...] [and that] geographical scale is socially produced as simultaneously a platform and container of certain kinds of social activity”. Similar to this, Swyngedouw (1997: 133) argues that scales are the “arenas around which sociospatial power choreographies are enacted and performed”. Thus, scales are conceptualised as material realities which therefore have a distinctly *fixed* element to them.

The problematic nature of treating scales as fixed is further explored by Adam Moore (2008: 208) who states that “however contingent and fluid our categories such as the nation or the national scale may be, once socially constructed they are treated [by political-economic approaches] every bit as real and fixed as ontological givens”. Because ontology is “not concerned with “what is”, but with *how* “what is” *is*” (Elden 2005: 16) then political-economic geographers reify scale by treating scales as the core spatial ‘units’ through which the social world ‘hangs together’ (Moore 2008). This issue clearly comes through in Smith’s concept of ‘scale jumping’; its separation of scales from social practices, whereby social actors can relocate themselves between different (albeit socially constructed) spatial levels highlights scales being understood as discrete and hierarchical orderings of space (Herod and Wright 2002). Kaiser and Nikiforova’s (2008) post-structuralist critique also focuses on the ontological basis of political-economic approaches. They importantly point out that at the foundation of the political-economic literature is a Marxian emphasis on materiality, and thus the way its authors deploy a distinctly “structuralist understanding of social construction as a process which produces solid, relatively stable constructs” (*ibid*, p.540) can be accounted for in this way.

Collinge (2005) is another author who has accused political-economic approaches of spatial fetishism in their approach to scale. Collinge adopts a post-structuralist, feminist approach to critique the writings of Eric Swyngedouw. Collinge firstly identifies how the dualism of ‘society and space’ is at the basis of political-economic understandings of scale. He notes

that Swyngedouw's work makes a distinction between society and space "in which scale is produced by social struggles for the command of a space that itself gives shape to social agency" (Collinge 2005: 203). However, Collinge also notes how political-economic approaches *undermine* the distinction between society and space by using 'scale' to refer to both social and spatial phenomena. This dualism is also undermined by fusing the categories of society and space into a common theoretical framework of scale and this, in turn, results in a form of spatial fetishism. Thus, political-economic approaches to scale "deconstruct themselves by simultaneously asserting and eroding the distinction upon which they depend" (*ibid*, p.203). What Collinge instead calls for is an understanding of scale which rejects the possibility of constructing a clear boundary between society and space.

In their controversial article, 'Human geography without scale', Marston *et al.* (2005) criticise the very focus on categories of scale. Firstly, the authors argue that there has been a long-standing confusion over the meaning of 'scale as size' – its horizontal scope – and 'scale as level' – referring to the vertical hierarchies of space. Marston *et al.* comment how a number of authors have made note of this conflation but none have resolved this issue. Secondly, Marston *et al.* state that the use of 'scale' in social analysis has made it impossible to escape the dualism of 'micro-macro' due to this being associated with 'local-global' scalar categories. They argue that this, in turn, results in theoretical distinctions of 'concrete-abstract' or 'agency-structure' being aligned with the 'local-global' binary when empirical work draws on the concept of scale. Thirdly, Marston *et al.* echo the concerns initially voiced by Howitt (1993) who suggested that the notion of scale 'levels' are in danger of becoming conceptual givens, something which would reflect the political labelling of administrative and territorial boundaries instead of "any serious reflection on socio-spatial processes" (Marston *et al.* 2005: 422). Finally, Marston *et al.* argue that uses of the notion of 'scale' have inhibited the self-reflexivity of researchers. They use the example of a researcher exploring 'the global' and suggest that it is impossible for him or her to write seriously about their situated positionality when they focus on the global as a conceptual field.

Moore's (2008) critique of attempts to conceptualise scale differ from those of Marston *et al.*'s. Instead of focusing on how scale is associated with ideas of vertical hierarchy, Moore criticises the way in which scale is not distinguished as a 'category of practice' from a

‘category of analysis’. To make this argument Moore draws on the work of Brubaker and Cooper (2000). These authors define ‘categories of practice’ as “categories of everyday experience, developed and deployed by ordinary social actors” (*ibid*, p.4). Brubaker and Cooper draw on Bourdieu’s (1977) theory of practice to argue that people use categories of practice “to make sense of themselves, [and] of their activities” (Brubaker and Cooper 2000: 4). Categories of practice are contrasted to ‘categories of analysis’ which are “experience-distant categories used by social scientists” (*ibid*). Brubaker and Cooper’s work illustrates this idea in relation to the term ‘nation’, which can be used both by lay actors when they make sense of the world (a category of practice) and by social scientists to understand the phenomenon of nationalism (a category of analysis). Sociologists have tended to “take a category inherent in the *practice* of nationalism – the realist, reifying conceptions of nations as real communities – and make this category central to the *theory* of nationalism” (*ibid*, p.5, emphasis in original). Brubaker and Cooper argue this is problematic because nations are not ‘things’ but *perspectives* on the world. Moore reworks this argument to maintain that the same conflation of categories has taken place in political-economic approaches to scale. He argues, “the tendency to partition the social world into hierarchically ordered spatial ‘containers’ is what we want to explain – not explain things with” (Moore 2008: 212) and that political-economic approaches have lost sight of this distinction.

Post-structuralist Alternatives

In her short article which commented on Kevin Cox’s (1998) work on ‘spaces of engagement’ and ‘spaces of dependence’, Katherine Jones (1998) presented what was to become one of the fundamental tenets of a post-structuralist approach to scale. Jones understands the ‘scale jumping’ activities of actors described in Cox’s empirical examples as the practice of representational strategies. When, for example, a group shows that a ‘local’ struggle may also be understood as a ‘global’ struggle this indicates how actors are representing their practices according to constructions of scale. Thus, Jones argues that “the construction of scale proceeds through representational practices” and that scale can be conceptualised as being “situated relationally within a community of producers and readers who give the practice of scale meaning”(Jones 1998: 26). In proposing scale to be a representational practice, Jones then questions what the implications of this are for its ontological status. Her response to this question is that scale is an *epistemological* rather than

an ontological concept; scale does not ‘exist’ but is, crucially, a key category – a *category of practice* – which actors use to interpret and strategically construct their social worlds.

To illustrate these arguments Jones uses the example of Söderström’s (1996) work which explores changing understandings of ‘the city’ in the context of planning practices over the last two centuries. Söderström highlights how representing urban information in the form of maps and zones has meant that the city has come to be understood according to these particular spatial and geometric systems. In this way, “what was considered ‘true’ about the city was altered” (Jones 1998: 27). If scale were to be treated as an ontological category, one could argue that these developments reflect a shift in scale (for example, from the neighbourhood to the metropolitan scale). However, this would be assuming that these scales exist. Instead, Jones argues that this development does not simply reflect a scale jumping activity but a fundamental shift in how the city is made sense of and comprehended. Thus, scale itself is being deployed as an epistemological frame for understanding the political and spatial nature of the city. Jones concludes by highlighting how “[i]t is scale’s taken-for-granted quality that provides its power” (*ibid*, p.28) and therefore understanding how scale functions an epistemological framework is key to revealing the power relations embedded within it.

Jones’ central argument about scale as an epistemological rather than an ontological concept has been used as a guiding principle for subsequent post-structuralist theorisations of scale. Her argument is also regarded as the key distinguishing factor between post-structuralist approaches and work originating from the political-economic tradition. Marston *et al.* (2005) (whose criticisms of political-economic approaches to scale have already been outlined) are amongst the post-structuralist authors who have built on Jones’ arguments. These authors have perhaps made the most radical and controversial suggestion for an alternative approach in that they argue for the complete removal of scale as a category in social inquiry. They instead suggest an alternative ‘flat ontology’ which proposes “studying humans and objects in their interactions across a multiplicity of social sites” (Marston *et al.* 2005: 427). A ‘social site’ here relates to a notion developed by the philosopher Theodore Schatzki (2002: 147) who defines it as “the site specific to human coexistence: the context, or wider expanse of phenomena, in and as part of which humans coexist”. Marston *et al.* argue that this ‘site ontology’ breaks free from the hierarchical scaffolding and structures of scale. It instead

requires the analyst to understand the social world as being in a constant state of *emergence* by focusing on the interactive processes which lead to the assemblage of sites, particularly the complex connections both within and between different sites. The authors claim that a key strength of a flat ontology is that it provides more ‘entry points’ through which to understand the politics of space compared to using scale which Marston *et al.* maintain will always be constrained by the way it encourages ‘top-down’ spatial understandings.

Following on from his criticism of the political economic approach to scale, Adam Moore (2008) also presents his own suggestions for changing the way scale is conceptualised. Moore presents a powerful post-structuralist agenda for scale research and suggests several alternative foci which he argues deserve greater analytical attention. Having highlighted the limitations of approaching scale as a ‘category of analysis’ Moore argues the latter should no longer form a part of researchers’ analytical stance and that focus should instead be exclusively on understanding scale as a ‘category of practice’. Although Moore states that he is in significant agreement with some of Marston *et al.*’s arguments and similarly to them approaches scale as an epistemological concept he does, however, refuse to agree with their call for the complete removal of scale from social inquiry. He argues that “if anything the apparent incongruence of ontological fictions such as local, urban, national or global scales having such a powerful influence on sociospatial politics cries out for closer attention to how scale operates as a category of practice” (Moore 2008: 213). Moore argues that to analyse the *politics* of scale does not necessitate a commitment to the *existence* of scales. For guidance on achieving the latter and simultaneously avoiding the trap of reifying scale Moore turns to Brubaker’s (1996) writing on ‘the nation’:

We should not ask ‘what is a nation?’ but rather: how is nationhood as a political and cultural form institutionalised within and among states? How does a nation work as a practical category, a classificatory scheme, as cognitive frame? [...] What makes the nation-evoking, nation-invoking efforts of political entrepreneurs more or less likely to succeed?

Brubaker (1996: 16)

By moving away from a focus on nation as a category of analysis to nationhood Brubaker re-directs analytical attention to the experiences and practices of ‘nation-ness’ and the consequences these in turn have on social relations (Moore 2008). Similarly, when theorising the politics of scale, if scales are treated as “powerful and institutionalised sets of

practices [...] rather than concrete things” (Moore 2008: 213; Paasi 2004), the analyst’s focus shifts to the processes by which particular constructions of scale come to the forefront of people’s consciousness and how actors make sense of their actions through scalar categorisations.

Moore concludes by suggesting a list of research avenues which he would encourage post-structuralist analysts of scale to pursue. I have distilled three of these which are of most relevance to the thesis’ focus on the study of policy. The first of these returns to Jones’ (1998) argument regarding scale as epistemology. Moore calls for more research to explore the implications of this by focusing on “the ways in which scalar narratives, classifications and cognitive schemas” (*ibid*, p.214) act as both enablers and constraints to particular ways of seeing, thinking and acting.

The second area of importance highlighted by Moore is for researchers to ask questions related to the processes of categorising and classifying scale – the way scalar categories are constructed, reproduced or dissolved are all key processes which need to be explored in greater depth. An example of this kind of study has been conducted by Kaiser and Nikiforova (2008) who explore the ‘performativity of scale’; their work highlights how a sense of place and identity is articulated through particular practices of constructing scales such as ‘the nation’.

Thirdly, Moore argues that ‘scalar projects and practices’ deserve greater attention from researchers. ‘Scalar practices’ refer to the way “actors use scale categories not just to interpret spatial politics, but to frame and define, and thereby constitute and organise, social life” (Moore 2008: 218). A key distinction here is to interrogate the scalar nature of practices rather than practices taking place at different scales – the latter kind of analysis will involve reifying scale as opposed to approaching it as a category of practice (Mansfield 2005). All three of these research avenues suggested by Moore are interrelated and hold great potential to overcome the limitations of political-economic approaches to scale by developing the idea of scalar practices through empirical inquiry.

Implications for Understanding Policy Implementation

This thesis argues that post-structuralist geographers' approach to scale is an ontological and theoretical standpoint from which studies of policy implementation have much to benefit. It is clear that the top-down, bottom-up and hybrid approaches in implementation studies all reify scale as the hierarchical scaffolding structure which a formulated policy moves through. Elmore's (1980) notion of 'backward-mapping' is a clear illustration of this – he suggests for the analyst to start at the lowest 'level' and move 'up' through the structure of implementing agencies and examine particular issues at each level. A post-structuralist approach would critique this by arguing that it is explaining the world through hierarchical scalar structures (using scale as a category of analysis) as opposed to these scales in themselves being the subject of analysis.

In addition to this, implementation studies have largely focused on scales as administrative structures. For example, Hjern and Porter's (1981) work sought to understand street-level work by focusing on "clusters of parts of public and private organisations" (*ibid*, p.211) and then went about mapping the network of implementation agencies and organisations. Moore would argue that this clearly approaches scales as a category of analysis as opposed to a 'category of practice'; it excludes the ways in which policy actors think about and deploy scalar classifications. In order to come closer to understanding the process through which scalar hierarchies are constructed and intersect with policy, it is important to focus on how actors situate themselves in the implementation process as opposed to ordering them according to the organisation in which they work. The latter is problematic because it imposes the argument that administrative structures are those which order policy actors' experiences.

It has already been acknowledged that interpretive studies of policy have done much to highlight the problematic assumptions of the positivist approaches to implementation but that interpretive policy analysis (IPA) has yet to extend its post-structuralist critique to fully engage with a critical understanding of scale. One exception to this is the work of van Lieshout *et al.* (2011; 2012) on 'scale framing'. The latter is a phrase used by Kurtz (2003: 894) who defines scale frames as "the discursive practices that construct meaningful (and actionable) linkages between the scale at which a social problem is experienced and the scale(s) at which it could be politically addressed or resolved." Van Lieshout *et al.*'s work

seeks to, firstly, identify and contrast the different scale frames employed by actors and, secondly, understand what the implications of scale frames are for the inclusion of actors and arguments in the policy process. Although the authors claim to be influenced by human geography their work draws on a definition of scale which has been created from studies of ecological economics: according to this scales are, “the spatial, temporal, quantitative, or analytical dimensions used to measure and study any phenomenon” (Gibson *et al.* 2000: 218). Within this framework a further distinction is made between scales and levels where the latter are “the different locations on a scale” (van Lieshout *et al.* 2011: online); for example ‘municipal’ and ‘national’ are different levels on the administrative scale. As a result of this framework, van Lieshout *et al.*’s work produces a detailed typology of scale frame ‘mismatches’, for example when actors frame an issue at different scales or at different levels of the same scale.

While van Lieshout *et al.*’s work represents an integration of IPA with a critical approach to scale, their approach is different to the one being employed here. This thesis will closely follow the approach to scale which has been suggested by post-structuralist human geographers, taking particular inspiration from the critical agenda of Moore (2008). It is an inquiry into the scalar practices actors employ during their policy implementation work. Instead of separating out scales into different categories and listing the ‘levels’ within them, this thesis will adopt a less structured theoretical framework in order to be able to understand *the process* of how scale categories are differentially constructed as categories of practice during the implementation of policy. It is anticipated that in order to achieve this kind of understanding that van Lieshout *et al.*’s different ‘types’ of scale – such as the administrative or spatial – are very likely to be inextricably linked and in order to understand how scale is constructed and deployed it is argued that these links should not be separated out in the analysis.

Bringing together an interpretive approach to policy with that of human geography would also serve to enrich the human geography literature on scale. When it comes to the study of policy the geographical preoccupation with scale and socio-spatial ordering has remained largely silent. Indeed, key scholars in the field such as Ron Martin (2001) and Doreen Massey (2000; 2001) have voiced concern over this absence and have called for the discipline to make a ‘policy turn’. In his article entitled ‘Geography and public policy: the

case of the missing agenda,' Martin (2001: 203) argues that, "a primary objective [of the geographical discipline] must be to demonstrate the crucial 'difference that place makes' in the construction, implementation and impact of public policy". He argues that while human geographers often look to other social science disciplines for inspiration on theoretical and methodological concepts they have been less open to collaborating with experts in other fields who specifically focus on the study of policy. An associated problem has been that researchers working in other disciplines "may well have to be persuaded that geographers have something distinctive and significant to bring to interdisciplinary policy study" (*ibid*, p.205). Thus, this thesis contributes to the attempt to address the 'missing policy agenda' that exists in human geography. By integrating geographical arguments about scale into the study of policy implementation it also aims to demonstrate the 'distinctive' and 'significant' contribution geography has the potential to make to policy studies.

The Research Puzzle and Question

In light of the above, the thesis adopts the same understanding of 'policy implementation' as interpretive studies and simultaneously combines this with post-structuralist human geographers' conceptualisation of scale as a category of practice. Importantly, IPA and post-structuralist human geographers share a common ontological position which makes their conceptual integration theoretically sound. Through combining these two literatures the thesis' overarching research puzzle has come sharply into focus. The puzzle identifies the absence of a critical approach to scale in IPA, and reflects on how there appears to be potential for interpretive understandings of policy to be further developed by approaching scale as a category of practice. In order to empirically explore this puzzle, the following overarching research question has been formulated:

*What kinds of scalar practices do actors deploy during their policy work,
and what kinds of politics do these practices comprise?*

This research question reflects an interest in exploring the meaning-making processes and practices of actors engaging with policy that is characteristic of interpretive approaches to policy, as well as post-structuralist human geographers' conceptualisation of scale as a category of practice.

The research puzzle and question will be empirically examined in relation to England's academies policy. Chapter 2 has highlighted how the academies policy is embedded in arguments about scale and therefore constitutes a highly appropriate choice of empirical focus.

The following sub-questions have been developed as a way of guiding analysis.

1. *Interpretations conveyed through scalar practices.* What interpretations of academies are developed through actors' use of scalar categories? How do scalar categories enable and/or constrain particular ways of understanding academies? How are particular scalar categories modified, reproduced or dissolved by actors and what does this expose about their interpretations of policy?
2. *Strategies embedded in scalar practices.* How are scalar categories deployed by policy actors to strategically define academies? What kinds of strategies do actors' scalar practices expose? How do competing scalar strategies interact or clash?
3. *The politics of scalar practices.* What do scalar practices reveal about the nature of politics being mobilised in actors' policy work? What kinds of concepts are interlinked with actors' scalar practices and what does this reveal about the kinds of politics being pursued?

These questions have utilised Moore's (2008) agenda for geographical research and reflect a modified focus to accommodate for the thesis' interest in policy.

Summary

This chapter has reviewed the key arguments which have featured in the study of policy implementation in political science and public administration. The discussion subsequently argued that an interpretive approach to policy is most conducive to the thesis' focus on understanding how actors create meanings during their policy work. The second part of the chapter reviewed the key debates that have played out in human geographers' critical approaches to scale and emphasised the ontological chasm that exists between political-economic and post-structuralist approaches. The discussion then presented the research

puzzle and overarching research question which involve bridging interpretive approaches to policy implementation with post-structuralist arguments about scale. This is an original theoretical coupling which has the potential to explore how actors engage in scalar practices during their policy implementation work. Theoretically conceptualising scale and policy as *practices* has profound empirical implications; these, along with other methodological considerations, are discussed fully in the next chapter.

CHAPTER 4

Methodology

The thesis has thus far introduced the research puzzle, outlined the context of the academy's policy, and proposed a theoretical framework which points to the possible importance of scalar practices in the way actors go about conducting their policy work. In this chapter I describe how I have designed a research project to explore this. I introduce the project's interpretive approach to policy, justify my case study design, discuss how I generated empirical data through conducting interviews, clarify any ethical considerations and reflect on the process of analysis and writing up. By doing this I hope to make transparent the key decisions I made for my research design and aim to convey the intellectual process through which the empirical and theoretical chapters of the thesis have developed.

An Interpretive Approach to Policy and Defining Practice

With my overarching puzzle relating to how actors go about interpreting and creating policy meanings, my project set out an *abductive research strategy* (Schütz 1963). This involves an interpretivist, relativist ontology which understands social reality as being “the symbolic world of meanings and interpretations” (Blaikie 2000: 116) rather than something which exists ‘out there’ to be subsequently interpreted. From this ontological standpoint, there is no single reality and instead there are multiple realities which are co-constructed by social actors as they make sense of their worlds. The epistemological assumptions of an abductive research strategy are that the researcher attempts to understand socially constructed realities by entering the social worlds of the research participants and listening to their ‘everyday accounts’. The researcher first uses these accounts to describe the meanings and processes which are being examined. Subsequently, “these redescriptions can be developed into theories that go beyond everyday language to include conditions of which social actors may be unaware” (*ibid*).

My approach shares the intellectual underpinnings of interpretive policy analysis (IPA). IPA encompasses a wide family of approaches but can broadly be characterised as a focus on what meanings are attached to policies by actors who engage with them, with an emphasis on the situated nature of these meanings (Yanow 2000)(Yanow 1996). I understand ‘interpretation’ to involve what Atwood and Stolorow (1984: 121) call “sustained empathetic inquiry” where ‘empathy’ involves prioritising the meaning of research participants and seeking to understand their ‘lifeworlds’. Yanow (2014) underlines that interpretive research involves several layers of interpretation: the researcher and participant (or ‘situated actor’) interpreting a particular research setting or interaction, the researcher interpreting their conversations with or observations of the situated actor, and the reader who eventually interprets the written report. Instead of seeking to create an objective evaluation of a policy or discern whether a policy has been successful or not, IPA is more concerned with *how* a policy means (Yanow 1996). This underlines how policy is understood according to the meanings it takes on when it is interpreted by actors who are involved in any aspect of the policy process. Approaching policy in this way demands research that takes contextual factors seriously and which is empirically-driven so that the researcher can engage in the social worlds of those he or she seeks to understand.

Interpretive approaches to policy have been influenced by the so-called ‘practice turn’ in social science. While practice approaches are associated with broad and multi-faceted bodies of work they “all highlight the significance of shared or collective symbolic structures of knowledge in order to grasp both action and social order” (Reckwitz 2002: 246). The implications of this in the area of policy studies has been to conceptualise policy as practice. Authors who have approached policy as practice articulate an interest in understanding the nature of policy-making and argue that “we know surprisingly little of what those we call ‘policy makers’ actually do” (Freeman *et al.* 2011: 128; Wagenaar 2004; Wagenaar and Cook 2003). This observation has led to the suggestion that there is a need for greater empirical inquiry into what kinds of things actors do when they are faced with the task of ‘implementing’ or responding to a policy. This is not to argue that practice is mere ‘doing’, instead, understanding policy practices involves scrutinising “specific configurations of action, norms and knowledge” (Freeman *et al.* 2011: 128). In addition, practice does not simply relate to the actions of individual actors. Wagenaar and Cook (2003: 151) argue that “action, as practice, means active participation in a community” – individual action always

points to an actor's position in their wider networks of relations, conventions and obligations which structure these actions. An important point here is that "traditional dichotomies as that between individual and environment" (*ibid*, p.171) are dissolved when policy is approached as practice. In this way, the purpose of inquiry is not to isolate action or agency from context or structures as these are in constant dialogue and hence impossible to prise apart.

Approaching policy as practice is closely linked to approaches to understanding 'policy work'. The notion of 'policy work' has been used by Hal Colebatch and his colleagues (Colebatch 2006; Colebatch *et al.* 2010) to explore the narrative function that accounts of policy activity have on policymakers and researchers' understandings of practice. The idea of policy 'work' which is more relevant to this study relates to the arguments of John Clarke (2012). Clarke argues that the absence of 'work' from analyses of governance has resulted in the persistence of approaching social processes according to 'black box' models. To overcome the latter, researchers need to understand actors as being engaged in a range of work activities "which, like all other forms of human labour, involve practices of transforming things" (Clarke 2012: 209). Clarke describes how policies "move from founding texts to guidelines, schemas and forms and become enacted in everyday practices in specific locations" (*ibid*, p.211). He highlights how these transformative, complex, situated practices need to be unpacked and how the 'work' involved in these needs to be scrutinised if we are to achieve a greater understanding of what policymakers do.

While this thesis pursues an interpretivist inquiry into understanding policy work, the concept of 'practice' that I specifically draw on is more firmly grounded in the work of post-structuralist human geographers. Chapter 3 outlined how Moore (2008) argues for scale to be understood as a 'category of practice'. According to this approach, practice involves actors using categories as a way of making sense of their social worlds. Following on from this, *scalar* practices reflect how actors use categories of scale "not just to interpret spatial politics, but to frame and define, and thereby constitute and organise, social life" (Moore 2008: 218). There are two key elements to this definition of practice. The first is that practice involves actors 'interpreting' their worlds through particular categories or lenses, and the second is that practice relates to how the social world is strategically framed, constructed and organised through mobilising specific kinds of classifications and

categories. Similar to the arguments made by Wagenaar and Cook (2003), post-structuralist human geographers' understandings of scalar practices dissolve traditional boundaries between structure and agency when interpreting the actions of actors. I thus understand scalar practices to reflect both the way scale operates as an epistemological concept which structures actors' world views, as well as how scale is strategically deployed by actors in their pursuit of particular political work.

What is clear in post-structuralist human geographers' conceptualisation of practice is that *representation* is understood to be a key part of practice. In the context of policy I argue that representation is a key dimension of practice because an integral part of what policymakers *do* is to talk about, make sense of and mobilise particular understandings of their work. Approaching practice in this way supports the way Katherine Jones (1998) refers to the construction of scale taking place through *representational practices* (as described in Chapter 3). Thus, in addition to having a research interest in what policymakers *do* – such as the decisions they make, the people they talk to, or the meetings they attend – my understanding of practice also leads to an interest in how actors articulate their dilemmas, deliberations and strategies – regardless of whether these eventually become 'actions' – when they describe and reflect on the process of implementing policy.

The Meaning of Interviews

An interest in practical policy work and the everyday deliberations of policy actors necessarily meant that my research was going to involve trying to create a window that would give me a glimpse into the lives of those involved in implementing academies. IPA advocates ethnographic observation or in-depth interview methods as a way through which to generate research insights and I chose to rely on the latter method in my own project. I made this choice because I wanted to explore the 'how' and 'why' questions behind policy actors' descriptions of the policy implementation process. I felt I would be less capable of doing this via ethnographic observation. In addition, I wanted to focus on participants' 'journey' of implementing the academies policy which would necessarily mean having conversations about the past and interviews, again, seemed to hold the most potential for achieving this.

I approach interviews as “reality-constructing, meaning-making occasions” (Holstein and Gubrium 1995: 4) as opposed to “objectified, free-standing entities that can be removed (“collected”) from the field setting” (Yanow 2003: 12). From this perspective, interviews are not a ‘pipeline’ through which to collect knowledge; they are instead ‘active’ (Holstein and Gubrium 1995) in that meanings which emerge are jointly created by the interaction between interviewer and interviewee. Indeed, this is why I talk about data ‘generation’ rather than ‘collection’ (see Yanow and Schwartz-Shea 2014). According to this approach, an effective interview does not involve the interviewer ‘controlling against’ possible bias or trying to appear ‘neutral’. It is instead assumed that all interviews are interactional in nature and that it is impossible for the interviewer to have an ‘objective’ presence. An effective interview is conducted in such a way that the interviewer encourages the interviewee to develop and reflect on their experiences in order to construct a detailed interpretation of the everyday practices of policy work.

Evaluating Interpretive Research

The quality of research is most commonly related to the ideas of ‘validity’ and ‘reliability’. Validity concerns the accuracy or truthfulness of research accounts and achieving reliability involves the potential for research findings to be reproduced by a third party (Silverman 2000). From these descriptions it is clear how issues of research quality have been associated with the positivist project of achieving objective and replicable research ‘results’, which explains the suspicion many interpretivist scholars have towards research being assessed according to a definitive set of criteria (Schwartz-Shea 2014). However, evaluative standards do not necessarily need to have positivist implications and can serve as guiding principles in the production of research in addition to helping decipher the quality of work (Miles and Huberman 1994). Schwartz-Shea (2014) has outlined what she calls an ‘inductive approach to a set of criteria’ as a way of assessing quality in interpretive studies. I have chosen the three main criteria from Schwartz-Shea’s list which I consider to be most appropriate to the focus of my project. These are: thick description, trustworthiness and triangulation – my project has attempted to reflect all these criteria of research quality.

‘Thick description’ is a phrase used by Clifford Geertz (1973) which has come to characterise what interpretive studies seek to achieve. A ‘thick description’ is generally acknowledged to be “a nuanced portrait of the cultural layers that inform the researcher’s

interpretation of interactions and events” (Schwartz-Shea 2014: 132). While Geertz discussed the importance of ‘thick description’ in relation to ethnographic writing as a way of determining that the researcher was present and engaged with the situation being described, the criterion can also be extended to other methods (including interviews) in interpretive research. Yanow (1996: 53) is amongst the many interpretive scholars who places great emphasis on ‘thick description’ and argues that, “[t]he “thicker” the description – the more details of lived experience, the more modes of symbolic expression that are discovered and described [...] – the more one is ascertained of the validity of one’s interpretation.” She goes on to contend that attention to ‘thick description’ and understanding the plurality of meaning is a demanding and rigorous task, which defends interpretive analysis from being labelled as being ‘impressionistic’. My empirical findings (Chapters 5 and 6) demonstrate how I paid particular attention to this criterion of ‘thick description’.

‘Trustworthiness’ has been discussed by Lincoln and Guba (1985) to refer to the transparency of a research process in order to ensure that the researcher’s decisions are systematic and ethical. Providing a detailed account of research design, sampling, fieldwork, generation of themes and analysis are key steps that can be taken to achieve this (Bryman 2012). My attempt to make all stages of my research project as transparent as possible in this chapter as well as throughout the thesis has aimed to achieve this notion of trustworthiness.

Finally, ‘triangulation’ is another technique through which research quality can be achieved. I prefer Schwartz-Shea’s (2014) term ‘multidimensionality’ instead of triangulation due to the latter having positivist implications of finding the same results when surveying a phenomenon from several perspectives or by using different methods. Using the term multidimensionality is more conducive to an interpretive approach because it holds the assumption that studying an issue from several perspectives is likely to result in greater complexity which may not necessarily create obvious clarity or consistency (Hammersley and Atkinson 1983). By examining two different local authority contexts and interviewing a range of actors within each of these, my project aimed to achieve multidimensionality.

The Case Study Design

Theoretical Approach

A case study can be broadly understood as an inquiry which typically displays the following characteristics: “(a) “how” or “why” questions are being posed, (b) the investigator has little control over events, and (c) the focus is on a contemporary phenomenon within a real-life context” (Yin 2009: 2). However, there is no single understanding of what case studies aim to achieve, what they represent and how they should be designed. Instead of approaching case studies as a methodological choice which outlines particular ways in which to carry out data collection, analysis and validity (see, for example, Yin 2009), I follow the arguments of Robert Stake (1994: 236) who argues that a “case study is not a methodological choice, but a choice of object to be studied”. This approach thus argues that there is no necessary association between a case study and a particular type of data collection strategy.

I found Stake’s ‘instrumental case study’ to be a heuristic which closely reflected my motivations for using a case study design. An instrumental case is designed “to provide insight into an issue or refinement of theory” (Stake 1994: 237); the case itself is not necessarily of primary interest and it instead functions as a *means* through which to develop understandings of the processes or phenomena which are being explored. My interest in how actors make sense of policy required a ‘case’ – a phenomenon located in a particular time and space (Hammersley 1992) – to use as a focus of investigation, with my subsequent conceptualisation of empirical data not being restricted to the particular case. My ontological standpoint clearly reflects how the project does not seek to make generalisations of a statistical nature. By following the principles of interpretive analysis my case study design aimed to provide a particular site where I could explore the complexity of a particular context before subsequently reflecting on the possible implications for theory (I explain this process in greater detail at a later stage of this chapter).

I selected the unit of my case to be the ‘local authority’ as this was most appropriate for my focus on the academies policy. Local authorities are the institutional, political and geographical units which are responsible for mediating the implementation of the academies policy and they therefore seemed the most reasonable ‘case unit’ to identify. I also decided that individual academy (school) case studies within the local authority would be valuable

due to actors in these institutions making decisions and deliberations over the national policy.

I chose to have two local authority cases which meant that I adopted a ‘collective case study’ design – a collective case study is a grouping of instrumental case studies (Stake 1995). The first reason for choosing to have two cases was that I anticipated that developing an understanding of two contexts would allow me to learn more about the process of policymaking as opposed to focusing exclusively on one. I by no means seek to undermine studies which focus on a single case but my decision was instead based on what I perceived to be the best fit for my project. I reflected on my own position as a researcher entering a policy environment with which I was entirely unfamiliar. I had very little idea of what to expect and how policy actors might be talking about academies – I reasoned that I was at risk of ‘normalising’ what I observed if I focused on one context. Two local authority cases therefore appeared to be beneficial to developing my interpretive understandings.

The second argument for choosing two case studies was that I wanted to explore two different landscapes of the academies policy: one relating to sponsored (typically low-performing) academies and one relating to the post-2010 converter (high-performing) academies. At the design stage of my project this distinction appeared to be a potentially important one to make (although once I embarked on my fieldwork and developed an analytical focus on the scalar practices of policy actors this factor was no longer an important consideration). The exploratory nature of my research interests and one of the main aims of instrumental (and collective) case studies being “to maximise what we can learn” (Stake 1995: 4) meant that investigating these two variants of the policy was a reasonable decision to make. I did not consider having more than two cases as I would have been unable to develop the depth of understanding which I aspired to achieve within the time and financial constraints of my PhD project.

Within each local authority I focused on four academy (school) cases. My arguments for designing two local authority case studies also apply to my choice of selecting multiple academy cases in each local authority. My choice was similarly limited by time and resources available for my project – I was unable to include any more academy cases without compromising the richness of empirical data.

Choosing the Cases

Confronted with 353 potential local authority case studies in England, I narrowed my choice by consulting statistical tables that listed local authorities against the number and proportion of schools which had academy status. I focused specifically on the proportions of academies in the *secondary school sector*. I did this because while I was designing my project it had been less than two years since the academies policy had been extended to primary schools under the 2010 Academies Act. There was thus a large disparity between the number of primary and secondary academies with the latter overwhelmingly outnumbering the former. This disparity was also due to the ‘converter’ option being far more popular in the secondary sector compared to the primary sector (something which remains the case at the time of writing). I therefore chose to focus on secondary academies as these would have constituted the main type of academy which local policy actors would have been most familiar with. I also narrowed my focus on local authorities which had *high proportions of academies* in their catchment area. I thought it would be more likely that in these local authorities the academies policy would be a more important consideration compared to authorities that were less affected by the policy. Having applied these selection ‘filters’ I then looked at the five local authorities with the highest proportions of sponsored academies, the top five for converter academies and subsequently chose one case from each list based on more practical considerations such as travel time. I chose two local authorities which I have called ‘Northwestern’ and ‘Eastshire’ and will now briefly describe them.

Case Study 1: Northwestern

Northwestern is a Metropolitan authority in the North West of England with a population of approximately 500,000. Several other metropolitan authorities cover the other urban areas of the surrounding region. The area experienced rapid urban growth during the 19th century when it became an important hub of industrial activity. However, by the early 1950s the industries that were responsible for its commercial success collapsed, leaving the area with housing issues, social poverty and urban deprivation. The last two decades have seen a significant economic restructuring of Northwestern, with investment being poured into a diversifying economy that includes financial services, retail, real estate and culture industries. However, the metropolitan area still remains high in the ranks of England’s most deprived local authorities. Educational performance and school attendance rates have a long

history of being consistently lower than the national average. The City Council has been consistently controlled by the Labour Party.

Sponsored academies became a significant part of Northwestern's educational landscape soon after New Labour's launch of the City Academies programme. When I selected Northwestern as a case study (in May 2012), one third of secondaries were sponsored academies and only 7% of its secondaries were converters. Outside London, Northwestern had one of the highest proportions of sponsored secondary school academies in England. Northwestern was therefore a highly appropriate choice of instrumental case study to examine the policy work taking place in a local authority with a high proportion of sponsored academies.

My interviews focused on the implementation of several sponsored academies which were developed under what was coined the 'Northwestern Academies Model.' When New Labour launched the academies policy in 2000 it was met with suspicion by Labour Party members in Northwestern City Council. These Council members expressed concern about having 'flagship' academies and thought that the policy would only bring benefits to isolated academies and exclude schools in the rest of the local authority area. The high number of underperforming schools in Northwestern, central government pressure on Northwestern City Council and the prospect of combining academies with *Building Schools for the Future* capital investments, all resulted in local authority officers considering the academies policy to be a valuable opportunity. However, if Northwestern was going to engage with the academies policy it needed to do so with the approval of Council members.

In light of this, officers developed and presented Council members with the 'Northwestern Academies Model'. In this model officers proposed making a number of modifications to the national policy which they argued would address the concerns of Council members. These changes included the City Council being an academy co-sponsor and therefore being a member of the Academy Trust Board. The model also prescribed that academy governors would include local authority representatives. A further modification was that academy sponsors would be chosen by the City Council and focus on Northwestern-based businesses which were important to the city's economic growth. The model noted that sponsors' commitment to the Council's vision and the city of Northwestern were to be considered

more important than their financial contributions. A Northwestern further education college would also act as a co-sponsor of every academy in the model. It was also emphasised how Northwestern Model academies would be integrated in the wider governance of education and children's services of the local authority, and that the buildings would be available for community use.

Despite many councillors remaining opposed to academies, the Model was accepted by Northwestern City Council in 2006 and it was agreed that six academies would be developed under this Model. Officers needed to convince the Department for Education and Skills (DfES) to agree to the Northwestern Academies Model, which it eventually did. This required periods of negotiation because the DfES was opposed to some of the modifications the Model had made to the national policy. Officers were also able to negotiate for sponsors to not have to pay the £2 million investment which was obligatory at the time. Northwestern officers recruited the sponsors of the six proposed academies in late 2006. Sponsors each recruited an individual to be principal of their academy in 2008 with whom they subsequently developed the academy vision and building design amongst other issues. Northwestern Model academies opened between 2009 and 2010.

In parallel to this, the local authority's education services and school improvement function experienced important changes in Northwestern. In 2006 the local authority was inspected and its school improvement function was deemed 'inadequate'. This led to a decision to re-design the local authority's education services in 2008 which included delegating the dedicated school grant to schools and making significant cuts to local authority staff. Traded education services were set up under the idea that schools were best placed to decide what services they wanted to buy.

Case Study 2: Eastshire

Eastshire is a shire county in the East of England which covers a large, mostly rural geographical area – it covers an area nearly 30 times larger than Northwestern. Its largest city has a population of under 120,000 and the county as a whole has approximately 550,000 residents. The economy of Eastshire currently relies on the high-tech sector, in fields such as wireless technology, semiconductors and mobile telecommunications. Indeed, it is one of the least deprived areas of England. Eastshire County Council has not been consistently

controlled by a single political party but at the time it was selected (and when the 2010 Academies Act was passed) the Conservative Party held overall control.

In terms of average educational performance, Eastshire schools consistently score above national averages but this also includes some small areas of persistent underperformance. ‘Area colleges’ (used here as a pseudonym) are a type of secondary school institution which is unique to Eastshire. These institutions originated in the 1930s and were set up in small rural settlements. They were founded on a particular philosophy which promoted serving the whole community (not just school children) and stemming migration from rural to urban areas. This ‘area college’ status was official for approximately 30 years and since then the status of these schools has been changing in line with policy trends over the past 4 decades. Eastshire also contains a high number of ‘community colleges’. Community colleges are a type of secondary school which originated in the late 1960s and whose guiding principles are similar to those of area colleges, for example, these schools were set up to contribute to the quality of life of their surrounding area and their buildings were made available for use by the wider public (Marks 1980). Despite all secondary schools in Eastshire now having academy status, many of these institutions continue to identify most strongly with their area college or community college identity.

Converter academies have become a dominant part of Eastshire’s educational landscape since late 2010 following the Academies Act. Indeed, Eastshire was one of the authorities with the fastest growth in converter academies. At the time that I selected the case study, with the exception of three London boroughs, Eastshire had the highest proportion of converter secondary schools in the country with over 90% of its secondaries converting to academy status. By the end of my fieldwork, all of its secondary schools had become or were about to become academies, with the majority of those being converters. These characteristics made Eastshire a highly appropriate instrumental case study (in a collective case study design) to understand policy work in a local authority with a high proportion of converter academies.

Prior to the 2010 Academies Act there were no academies in Eastshire. The County Council anticipated that the Coalition government’s reforms would lead to a large proportion of schools considering academy status and it therefore decided on a clear position it would be

taking before schools started to convert. This position was that the Council was ‘neutral’ towards academies and was there to support the decisions of schools and their communities regardless of whether they wanted to convert or not. The Council argued that it remained committed to working in partnership with schools and academies. Although academies are no longer accountable to their local authority, officers set up annual ‘keeping in touch’ visits where they visit academies to informally express an interest in their development and discuss any issues that principals or governors may wish to bring up. This has been welcomed by academies and has been extended to termly visits.

The high proportion of secondary schools converting to academies led to a significant decrease in the budget of Children and Young People’s Services in Eastshire. In response, the local authority restructured its education services in 2011 to create a traded model. This includes a ‘subscription service’ which offers three different ‘bundles’ of school services (the cheapest offering a basic set of services and the most expensive a more comprehensive range). Eastshire officers have also been encouraging schools and academies to enter closer collaborations with each other in an attempt to develop a ‘self-improving school system’ where schools mutually support each other. This strategy has also been shaped by the impact of academy conversion on the budget of Children and Young People’s Services.

Generating Data

“we note here our preference for talking about “generating” data rather than the more widely used “collecting” data. The latter term is laboratory language, in which butterflies or potsherds or other artifacts are physically gathered up and brought back to the lab for analysis; whereas in the nonexperimental, field-based studies conducted in the human sciences, the primary “data” and their sources are left in their locations of origin (or should be).”

Yanow and Schwartz-Shea (2014: xxi)

The Interviewees

Local Authority Officers

I identified local authority officers working in education and children’s services as being key interview participants. Unlike councillors, local authority officers “have not been elected, and their role is to ensure that the policy laid down by the councillors is implemented and that all their reasonable and lawful instructions are carried out” (Wilson and Game 2002:

95). The role of officers is therefore to map out detailed strategies as a way of actualising the general vision of councillors. In light of this, I considered officers to be in the most suitable position to discuss how their Council has reacted to the national policy and, critically, able to describe the myriad of processes, relationships and decisions involved in 'implementing' academies.

Officers from Northwestern City Council were responsible for developing the 'Northwestern Academies Model,' leading negotiations with central government around this, recruiting academy sponsors and constantly reporting back to councillors about the model's progress among other tasks. Five interviews were held with individuals who played a key role as an officer in the implementation of the Northwestern Academies Model. The Model was developed in 2002 which helps to explain why only one of the interviewees held an officer position in Northwestern City Council at the time of interview; two no longer worked as officers, one was temporarily working in an officer role and one had retired.

In Eastshire County Council, the responsibilities of officers included understanding the effects of a high number of schools converting to academy status, upholding the Council's officially 'neutral' stance towards the academies policy, and interacting with all schools and academies in the area in some capacity. Five officers were interviewed in Eastshire and they all held this position at the time of interview (academies only developed in Eastshire after the 2010 Academies Act).

Academy Sponsors in Northwestern

I also identified academy sponsor representatives as being key players in the Northwestern Academies Model. Once they were recruited by officers they were central participants in the implementation of the Model. I wanted to interview sponsor representatives because they were instrumental in convincing their organisation to become involved in the academies policy, they had collaborated with officers and principals to develop their particular academy vision, and once the academy had opened they continued to be heavily involved with it. I have written about the involvement of Northwestern sponsors in their academies in greater detail in a publication for the *European Educational Research Journal* (Papanastasiou 2013) and have obtained permission from the publisher to include a copy of this article in Appendix 1. It was clear that asking sponsors to describe and reflect on these experiences

would be of great importance to understanding the development of academies in Northwestern. I conducted six interviews with academy sponsor representatives (two participants were representatives from the same sponsor organisation and involved in the same academy).

Academy Principals in Northwestern

Interview participants in Northwestern also included principals of Northwestern Model academies (no longer being called ‘Headteachers’ under the academies policy). I chose to interview academy principals because they had been recruited by sponsors and collaborated with them during the development of their academy project. The role of principals continued to be instrumental after the opening of their academy as they are responsible for the day-to-day running of the institution; they are accountable to the sponsor, with whom they constantly interact and collaborate. Four academy principals were interviewed. Although I held interviews with six sponsors, I focused on four academy cases in greater detail by also interviewing their principals. Guided by the aims of an instrumental case study, I reasoned that I would achieve the greatest insights by focusing on academies which were very different to each other. With this in mind – as well as relying on how responsive principals were to my interview request e-mails – I chose two academies which had replaced previous ‘failing’ schools and two which were completely new. Every academy in the Northwestern Academies Model had a different sponsor and therefore all four were very distinct in this way.

Academy Principals and Chairs of Governors in Eastshire

I chose to focus on academy principals and chairs of governors in Eastshire’s converter academies. These individuals were responsible for jointly deciding whether to convert to academy status. A principal who wanted to convert their school into an academy would need to gain the approval of the school’s Board of Governors, which is led by the Chair. The principal and chair of governors also took the lead during the ‘consultation period’ where they communicated their wish to convert to academy status to a range of relevant parties (such as teachers, parents and the wider community) and needed to respond to concerns or questions about the matter. The close collaboration between principals and chairs of governors during the process of converting to academy status justifies why the two have been grouped together. The principal and chair of governors from four Eastshire

converter academies were interviewed (this amounted to a total of eight interviews). While my selection of these academies was partly reliant on the responsiveness of principals and governors to my e-mails, I purposefully chose two academies which were situated in rural areas and two which were located in urban areas. Of these four, two were academies that had been amongst the first converters due to having received 'outstanding' in previous Ofsted reports and two had converted at a later stage once academy conversion was also made available to schools which had received 'good' in their previous inspection. This choice was informed by the instrumental case study criterion of 'maximising learning' which I hoped to achieve by including a diversity of academies.

In Chapters 5 and 6 I have labelled interviewee quotations in the following manner: NW or E indicate the interviewee being from the case of Northwestern or Eastshire respectively. This is followed by either LA (local authority officer), P (academy principal), S (academy sponsor) or G (academy chair of governors). Finally, this is followed by a number which aims to distinguish between different interviewees sharing the same label. Thus, a quotation by NW-LA4 is from a local authority officer in Northwestern and the number 4 distinguishes this individual from other Northwestern officer interviewees.

Choosing to Exclude Actors from Fieldwork

My choice of interview participants may appear to be excluding important parts of the academies 'policy community'. In this section I briefly justify what might seem like the most obvious exclusions.

Local authority councillors who have played a particularly active role in shaping discussions and debates around the academies policy could be considered an important exclusion. At the early stages of my fieldwork I considered councillors as possible participants. I identified and carried out an interview with a councillor in each local authority and while both these interviews helped put me in touch with key officers in each case, I chose not to pursue further interviews with councillors. My justification for this was that the councillors had tended to focus on the general political debates related to academies. Also, their insights into the finer details of how the policy was being implemented were shallow in comparison to those articulated by officers.

Teachers working in academies are another part of the policy community which could be seen as an important absence in the research. I had originally included teachers in my research design and the principal of the first academy I visited in Eastshire actually set up three interviews with teachers for me. These interviews proved to be very difficult and awkward due to the teachers knowing very little about the deliberations over the decision to convert to an academy, which is what most of my questions were focused on. The only issue the teachers showed any significant interest in discussing related to whether their pedagogical methods had been affected by academy status. I decided that the latter was too removed from my research interests and I subsequently pursued no further interviews with teachers and have not included the interviews with the three teachers in my analysis. (I have been in touch with the academy principal who arranged these interviews in order to explain this issue.)

Prior to starting fieldwork I had also anticipated that other governors – not just the Chair – would be important research participants. I conducted an interview with an academy governor in both Northwestern and Eastshire and subsequently decided to exclude these participants from the project. Similar to the case of teacher interviews, governors had not been present during the negotiations and deliberations over how to go about implementing the academies policy. Both governors focussed on the personalities of the leadership team and praising them in a personal manner which I felt was too removed from my research interest. The teachers and governor in Eastshire gave brief accounts of the consultation process which I could have included in my analysis, however their descriptions were largely repeated in much greater detail by principals and chairs of governors.

The parents of students attending academies, the students themselves and the surrounding community also participate in giving meaning to the academies policy. However, I decided that including these individuals would risk losing focus on my research interest in the practices of mediating and making sense of policy implementation.

Access and Entering the Field

The first stage of the research process which was essential to fieldwork preparations involved reviewing a range of national documents related to the academies policy. These

documents included White Papers, legislation, documents from the House of Commons Library, and politicians' speeches. The earliest document was that of the 1988 Education Reform Act which, as Chapter 2 made clear, can be considered the most relevant historical starting point for the academies policy. By reviewing these documents I developed a comprehensive understanding of the official narrative and historical context of academies; this was essential contextual knowledge for my interviews and also contributed to the crafting of my interview questions.

When preparing to 'enter the field' and approach potential participants I spent significant time looking through relevant Council committee meeting minutes and webpages to help me identify which officers were involved in activities relating to academies. This also enabled me to become familiar with the kinds of issues related to academies that were being discussed and debated in each local authority case study. I also used academy websites to identify the principal, chair of governors or sponsor representative and find their contact details. I chose to make contact with potential participants through e-mailing them directly. E-mailing personal assistants or secretaries was a last resort because the response rate of these individuals tended to be very low. A sample of this e-mail can be found in Appendix 2. I aimed to keep my e-mail brief as I thought my chances of a response would improve if the recipient did not need to spend a long time reading through it. However, I attached an Information Sheet (see Appendix 3) to this e-mail which explained the project in greater detail as well as the format of the interview should the person agree to participating in the project. If I did not receive a response I waited for two weeks before e-mailing a potential participant again; I would repeat this for a third time before assuming that they did not wish to speak to me.

I also used a 'snowballing technique' as a way of identifying further potential interviewees (Miles and Huberman 1994). This was particularly useful in revealing actors of whom I was unaware during the early stages of fieldwork, especially when these individuals had retired or moved to different professional positions. Some interviewees would recommend talking to individuals who I had already identified or interviewed which proved to be useful for developing my understanding of the relevant actors involved in the academies policy. Another anticipated advantage of snowballing was that individuals may have been more willing to talk to me if I mentioned that one of their colleagues had suggested I speak to

them. What became very apparent was that ‘snowballing’ works most effectively when the researcher is aware of existing professional hierarchies amongst the individuals being targeted for participation. This was most noticeable in the case of sponsored academies. My initial attempts to make contact with academy principals were either met with silence or a decline to participate. Sponsor representatives proved to be a great deal more responsive to my e-mails. Being able to contact principals and mention that the sponsor (their employer) had recommended that I speak to them resulted in an immediate response and acceptance of my request for an interview. The importance of understanding any possible hierarchies of authority and combining this with snowballing was thus paramount to successfully securing access.

During my early attempts to make contact with participants I also thought I would try attending some relevant Council committee meetings as a member of the public and subsequently approach officers at the end of these sessions to introduce myself. In these first attempts to ‘enter the field’ my strategy was to remain inconspicuous unless there was an appropriate moment to introduce myself. Things did not go quite to plan when I arrived at the first of these committee meetings, only to be politely asked who I was and informed that I was sitting at the table reserved for the committee rather than the seats for the general public. My sense of being a strange outsider to this policy world which I was trying to understand was particularly acute that day. After attending two of these meetings in Northwestern I abandoned this strategy. I found officers would spend very little time hanging around before or after the meetings, leaving me with limited opportunity to talk to them.

The Interviewing Process

Interview Format and Structure

The interviews I developed were ‘semi-structured’ and involved a range of open-ended questions which allowed for interviewees’ reflections to significantly shape the discussion (Arksey and Knight 1999). I took a topic list to each interview which I used to remind myself of the key issues that I was interested in covering. The topic list would always be tailored to the specific interviewee. Throughout the course of the interviewing process this topic list became less detailed as my confidence in my interviewing ability grew. Questions were oriented around the following general themes:

- the participant's professional role and how they have come to be involved with the academies policy through this;
- the participant's initial reaction to the academies policy;
- decisions around engaging with the policy;
- the process of schools becoming academies and the actors involved in this;
- any perceived changes related to the academies policy;
- the meaning of academies being 'free from local control' and 'directly accountable to central government' (these are descriptions of academies from national documents);
- anticipated future developments in the academies policy.

The order with which these themes were explored was always specific to how the interview played out. Topics rarely remained distinct from each other during the interview process and interviewees would instead touch upon several of them during the description of a single issue or event. Also, interviews did not involve topics being 'ticked-off'; interviewees re-visited the same issue several times often approaching it from different angles and, as a result, not expressing one particular 'opinion' but instead multiple (and sometimes contradictory) layers of reflection. I aimed for my questions to be as open-ended as possible in order for the participants to discuss issues in the way that they felt was important. I posed questions using phrases such as: 'could you tell me about...' and 'what are your thoughts on...' to facilitate this.

I conducted the majority of interviews on a face-to-face, one-to-one basis. The two exceptions to this were an interview which was conducted over the phone and another interview where I arrived to find my interviewee had invited one of their colleagues. Meeting participants in person allowed me to introduce myself and attempt to establish some rapport with the participant which I hoped would make them feel at ease with the interview situation. I found that the participants with whom I had the chance to have an informal conversation with before starting the interview were more at ease and more reflective earlier on in the interview compared to those with whom this was not possible. The interview location was usually selected by the interviewees as I wanted them to choose a venue they felt comfortable with. Interview locations included: six interviews in Council offices, ten interviews in academy buildings, two in academy sponsor headquarters, four in

other professional offices, three in cafés and one in a hotel lobby. Two interviewees asked me to select the interview location and for these I chose a quiet café.

Most of my participants (or their personal assistants) asked me to specify how long the interview would last and most agreed to meeting for one hour. My participants' professional lives consist of a busy schedule of back-to-back meetings which meant that the interviews tended to last for the period of time I was allocated. Some interviewees were willing and able to spend more time talking to me and these interviews lasted a little longer (the longest being 1 hour and 50 minutes). One interviewee was only free for a 40-minute interview.

I conducted all interviews between September 2012 and April 2013. As I was using a snowballing technique I tended to spend one-week periods in Northwestern and Eastshire before returning to Edinburgh to arrange further interviews with new contacts I had been given.

I digitally audio-recorded all the interviews. I had notified participants that interviews would be recorded prior to meeting them, which offered them an opportunity to raise any concerns about the recording. At the early stages of my interviewing experience I quickly became aware of the recorder being an 'object of power'. I was struck by how all interviewees would stop our conversation and comment on the recorder when they caught sight of it and that they would often seem unsettled or suspicious of it. This proved to be disruptive to the crucial first minutes of establishing rapport with my participants and after the first few interviews I decided to keep the recorder (switched off and) out of sight until the participant was comfortable for the interview to begin. I would then ask if they were comfortable for the recording to take place, explain my reasons for recording the interview, and how I would use the data. This approach proved to be much less unsettling for the participants compared to being immediately confronted with the recorder.

I had also planned to take notes during the interview to record anything that came across as particularly striking or worthy of a follow-up question. I also thought note-taking would be useful for documenting information that cannot be captured by a recording, such as facial expressions and body language. For example, Holstein and Gubrium (1995: 79) argue that "[s]igns of confusion, contradiction, ambiguity, and reluctance should [...] be noted"

because these aspects of conversation often suggest that the interviewee is mulling-over or making sense of certain meanings. When it came round to the interviews however, I found myself taking very few notes. Firstly, as I would only occasionally take notes, interviewees would very often peer down and try to read what I was writing which proved to be a distraction for them. Secondly, participants sometimes appeared to be put on edge when I decided to note something down. This would sometimes lead to them rephrasing or clarifying their views which, again, suggested to me that taking notes was disruptive to the interviewing process. Important emotions such as laughter, hesitation or frustration were still apparent on the audio recording so I resorted to taking a minimum amount of notes during the interviews and writing any necessary notes immediately afterwards in private.

I drew the interview to a close by asking participants whether there was anything else they would like to discuss which we had not yet explored. Responses to this question were varied, with some participants enthusiastically re-starting the conversation and others simply saying that they had nothing more to add. I also asked if participants would like a copy of the research findings at the end of the project (all replied that they would). Many asked when I expected my project would be written up and of these almost all were alarmed at the amount of time it would take. Finally, I made sure that I sent participants an e-mail within 24 hours of the interview, thanking them again for their time.

Transcribing

I fully transcribed all the interview recordings myself. I started out with the good intentions of doing this within a few days of the interview but soon realised that this was impossible when faced with multiple interviews during a single week. My transcription tended to take place any time up to 3 weeks after each interview. While transcription proved to be a time-consuming process, with hindsight it allowed me to mull over the interviews and I took the opportunity to make notes on any emergent impressions. Also, as has been noted by Kvale and Brinkman (2009), transcribing the interviews myself forced me to re-visit the interview situation and allowed me to learn about my personal interviewing style and reflect on anything I could be doing differently. I considered full (as opposed to selective) transcription to be essential; I was wary of the idea of fragmenting interviewees' narratives and also felt that I was unable to discern what was 'relevant' or not at this early stage of the project.

Interview Politics

Having had very little experience of carrying out research interviews prior to my PhD fieldwork I entered my first interview with a great sense of the unknown. In hindsight, I now realise this sense of the unknown is precisely the point of conducting an exploratory interview, however, at the time this was very disconcerting. Once I started my fieldwork, every interview proved to be a learning experience, something which was helped by the variety of participants who I was engaging with. I will now briefly reflect on some of the lessons I learnt.

I found interviews to be a balancing act between the interviewee articulating their reflections and myself as the interviewer guiding the discussion. During the interviews I developed a general idea of how and when it was appropriate for me to prompt my participants. If interviewees were discussing their work in a very general or abstract way I would ask them if they could give me a specific example in order for them to articulate a more detailed description. I also prompted participants to explain certain issues in greater detail when they only briefly alluded to them, perhaps because they considered them unimportant or mundane. In some interviews with sponsors and principals in Northwestern, participants would focus on promoting the sponsor organisation – these were also instances where I would interject to encourage them to link this to their reflections on the academies policy.

My participants typically arrived at the interview with a particular message they wanted to tell me about. It was common for interviewees' response to my introductory question to be very long as they would first respond to my question and subsequently re-direct the discussion to what they were anxious to clarify or describe about their position. I considered this to be an essential part of 'setting the scene' for the rest of the interview as it made me aware of how the interviewee understood academies and reflected on the policy, which was useful in helping me frame my later questions. In addition, I sensed that giving participants freedom to re-direct the discussion and express themselves as fully as they wished during the initial stage of the interview helped them become more comfortable with the research context.

Another key learning experience for me was understanding the importance of creating my identity as an interviewer and conveying this effectively to my interviewees. I became aware of the need to develop and convey a clear image of 'who I was' very early on in the interview process. Wagenaar (2011: 252) has referred to this by stating that "you have to try hard to understand how the respondent "reads" you as an interviewer". I had originally expected all my interviewees to label me as a generic 'PhD student' who knew little about the 'real world' of implementing policy, which is what I had emphasised in my e-mails and project description. I soon realised that each participant was arriving at the interview with a different expectation of who I was; popular pre-conceptions about me included that I was an educationalist, naïve student, evaluator, or advocator of a particular political position. One thing which I took care to emphasise at the beginning of each interview was that I was very aware of the official documents and history of the academies policy on a national level. I also highlighted to participants that I had never worked in a policy context before and therefore had limited understanding about what policy actors do when they are confronted with the task of implementing a national policy. By presenting myself in this manner I made it clear that I was interested in being told about what participants could have considered being their daily, ordinary and 'mundane' routines, meetings and conversations. It also conveyed that I was less interested in being told about the 'national story' of academies (for example, one of my first interviewees spent a great deal of time telling me what the official definition of an academy was) and that I was more interested in how they made sense of the policy in their particular role and context. Furthermore, I underlined that I was not an educationalist but was interested in policy, which avoided a discussion about whether academies led to school improvement or not.

I consciously avoided labelling the project participants as 'policy elites' which supports the reflections of Katherine Smith (2006: 645) that "power exists in a variety of modalities [...], that these modalities of power can be negotiated and are neither constant nor inscribed". Thus, the notion of an 'elite' individual does not recognise the chameleonic and temporary nature of power. Although I entered the field with this awareness of the fluid nature of power relations I did not appreciate how complex this would be until I was actually conducting interviews. An interview which I found particularly challenging to manage was one I conducted with an academy sponsor. On paper this individual was a typically 'powerful' professional who occupied several prestigious positions in large organisations, all

of which he listed to me when we met. I consequently felt very humbled that he had spared me the time to participate in the research as well as concerned about whether he would consider the interview and my questions to be a worthwhile use of his time. However, power dynamics suddenly shifted when I asked whether we could start the interview. The interviewee responded by telling me about having a damaging interviewing experience with an undercover journalist who quoted him out of context which subsequently led to one of his team members resigning. From exuding confidence and ‘power’ my participant became defensive, hostile and, I realised, was left feeling vulnerable in my presence. As I did my best to reassure him that my status as a PhD student was not a fabrication, I realised I was negotiating through a complicated power landscape. The interviewee regarded me as a possible threat and, simultaneously, I was reliant on him to answer my questions. What this and, indeed, all my interviews taught me was that while the shifting nature and guises of power make these dynamics highly unpredictable, an effective interviewer is constantly sensitive to these dimensions in order to guide the interview in the appropriate direction.

Leaving the Field

My choice to no longer carry out any further interviews was based on a sense that I was beginning to experience a form of ‘saturation’. With all my participants, the interview conversation had started to become familiar and somewhat predictable; interviews began to feel less like a ‘strange’ journey into the unknown. I was no longer being corrected by my interviewees when I described my impressions of what the academy’s policy meant to them and their organisation. It therefore became clear that conducting further interviews would not significantly change my existing insights and I instead needed to distance myself from the field to give myself space to reflect.

Ethical Considerations

My project design did not hold any potential risks to participants or myself and I was only required to gain approval for the lowest degree of risk according to the University of Edinburgh Research Ethics assessment. Prior to embarking on fieldwork I formulated the following research ethics statement which was approved by the University:

The project does not hold any potential risks to participants or myself, none of the participants are classified as ‘vulnerable individuals’, data will be stored in a password-secured computer,

interviews will be anonymised to ensure a high degree of confidentiality, direct consent will be received from participants and, finally, the research will not involve any 'conflict of interest' as outlined by the University.

Both during my fieldwork and analysis I realised that actually achieving the ethical practices outlined in my statement above involve careful and sometimes difficult considerations.

One of my main ethical priorities related to protecting the individual identity of the interview participants. As well as concealing participants' names, any information about them that was deemed specific enough to that individual and risked their identity being revealed was removed from interview excerpts used in this thesis (and other research outputs). Statements which pose a risk to individual anonymity have only been described rather than directly quoted and all interview recordings and transcripts were securely handled.

I also chose not to name the two local authority case studies. One advantage of this was that it further enhanced the individual anonymity of the interview participants. It is likely that the local authorities will be recognisable to some people, but the great care I have taken to ensure quotations cannot be attributed to particular individuals means that ethical standards will remain uncompromised. Another reason for anonymising the local authorities is that it helped to support the abductive logic of the research project and the aims of the collective case study design. Anonymisation emphasises that cases and individuals are illustrative examples which can be used to develop broader conceptual insights (Nespor 2000; Vainio 2013); I therefore felt that anonymising the local authority cases complemented my overall approach to empirical analysis. In Eastshire, 'Area Colleges' are a pseudonym as the real name of these institutions would reveal the identity of Eastshire local authority.

Informed consent was another ethical imperative. Following the guidelines of the Social Research Association I understood informed consent to involve telling participants about the aims of the research, format of the interview, how the interview data would be used together with anything else that may affect participants' willingness to take part in the research (SRA 2003). I gained the informed consent of my participants by providing them with an information sheet when I initially e-mailed them to ask whether they would agree to

be interviewed. The information sheet outlined the project aims, why the person had been contacted for an interview, the interview format, how the interview data would be used, information on anonymity, and details of who was funding and supervising the research (see Appendix 3). To provide some background information about myself I also sent them a CV. At the beginning of every interview (before starting the recorder) I verbally repeated all the key points contained in the information sheet and clarified that participants could ask to stop the interview or withdraw from the research at any point.

I chose not to use consent forms because I was concerned that these would have the effect of unsettling my participants rather than putting them at ease, and I considered the latter to be the most ethical way of conducting an interview. A number of researchers have reflected on the problematic nature of consent forms and how they can “seem alien, [and] unduly formal” (Haggerty 2004: 404) in particular research contexts. Van den Hoonaard (2001: 28) has discussed how “obtaining signatures from those who occupy positions of power and prestige” can often be deemed inappropriate and is likely to put participants on edge due to the legalistic and official nature of this kind of consent. This point was certainly relevant to my own project where most of my interviewees held professional positions at a high level in their organisations. Despite not using consent forms I upheld all the necessary characteristics of informed consent by conducting my interviews in the way I have described above. None of my participants questioned the lack of consent form at the interview.

My plan to use a snowballing technique resulted in some dilemmas around anonymity which I had not predicted prior to starting the interviews. When I asked participants whether they could recommend someone else to speak to the natural response for many of them was to ask who else I had already interviewed. I was forced to explain that I could not share this information with them in order to ensure a high degree of confidentiality. Interviewees reacted in a variety of ways to this; some considered it to be a sign of professionalism on my part (“that’s fair enough, I suppose it shows that you’re being professional about all this and that you’re taking it seriously”). Others appeared to consider my stance to be strange or overly cautious (“I was going to send my regards [to the other participants]! What if I said some names and you nod if they’re the right ones?”).

Part of the major strength I saw in using snowballing was that I would be able to contact people and mention that they had been recommended by their colleague who had also participated in an interview; I thought this would increase my chances of gaining access. However, if I were to do this it would mean revealing the identity of research participants. The best way of overcoming this was to mention that I had 'been in contact' with their colleague and frame the recommendation in this manner, thus making it ambiguous as to whether I had actually interviewed them.

Despite the above, there were instances where it was simply impossible to completely conceal who I had interviewed. My participants worked in a close professional network which meant that they discussed being interviewed by me with each other, some had access to each other's professional diaries which indicated their interview appointment with me, and others saw me entering their colleagues' offices. These instances highlight that completely concealing the identity of research participants is in actual fact very difficult to achieve in practice, something which has been acknowledged by a number of qualitative researchers (Nespor 2000; Vainio 2013). Importantly, the way in which the interview data has been anonymised and used in excerpt form has, however, made it extremely unlikely for a single individual to be linked to a particular quotation or opinion.

I informed interviewees that they could request to see a copy of the interview transcript if they wished to check it for 'anonymity and accuracy'. By specifying the latter I hoped to discourage participants from changing large parts of the transcript or making modifications (such as grammatical mistakes) which did not relate to anonymity and accuracy. However, only one interviewee requested a copy of the interview transcript and made no suggestions for modification.

Analysis and Writing Up

The process of analysis and writing up did not suddenly begin once I had completed all my interviews. During the interviewing process I began to notice how my participants were constructing particular meanings or considered certain questions to be more pertinent than others. I found my observations were greatly helped by the way in which a very different 'story' of the academies policy was emerging in each case study and this highlighted the way

in which the policy was intersecting with particular contexts. Completing my interviews allowed me to engage with the empirical material with less distraction and I began to move back and forth between my observations and theoretical literature.

This process closely mirrored that which is recommended by interpretivist scholars whose approach is informed by ‘grounded theory’. The latter is a type of “analysis that successively moves from studying concrete realities to rendering a conceptual understanding of these data” (Charmaz and Belgrave 2012: 347). The founders of grounded theory, Glaser and Strauss (1967), discussed a strategy where researchers could develop middle-range theories which could effectively illuminate the implications of qualitative data. Since then, grounded theory has been used in a plethora of ways and in my research I have used it as a heuristic strategy (Wagenaar 2011) where there is emphasis on finding categories which appropriately capture the data and which are meaningful to the processes which are being studied (Glaser and Strauss 1967). The following comment by Charmaz (2006: 49) highlights the emphasis on close engagement with empirical data which is compatible with an interpretivist approach: “If you ignore, gloss over, or leap beyond participants’ meanings and actions, your grounded theory will likely reflect an outsider’s rather than an insider’s view”. Thus, the process of developing grounded theory involves constant iteration between empirical data and theory in order to ensure that the two are closely interlinked and that conceptual insights do not become disconnected from the realities of the research participants.

While I had a pre-existing interest in integrating perspectives from human geography’s focus on ‘space’ with interpretive studies of policy, I was unsure whether this would turn out to be an appropriate marriage of ideas so I considered it to be a possible option rather than a rigid personal aim. I found Wagenaar’s (2011: 259) characterisation of grounded theory as “a generative confrontation of our initial ideas and preconceptions about our project with the body of empirical material that we are collecting” to be a particularly pertinent description for this period. I experimented with a range of themes and theoretical ideas which meant making repeated close readings of the interview material to discern what the participants were conveying about their ‘lifeworlds’. I moved between interview transcripts, theoretical literature, and my understandings of emerging themes to ask myself what the empirical data was telling me about policy actors’ interpretations of policy.

I used NVivo software to explore themes through coding interview transcripts and used the coded material to produce sets of themed interview excerpts. I regarded the software as being a useful tool for managing my data and easily searching through it rather than an essential tool for analysis. I was cautious of overly focusing on coded interview excerpts during my analysis because I felt this risked them becoming disconnected from the overall interview narrative. I therefore made the effort to constantly re-familiarise myself with the complete interview transcripts in addition to working with coded interview excerpts.

I did not settle with the idea of 'scale' very easily. It struck me as a concept which imposed false boundaries on social and physical 'space' and I feared that it may cause me to impose problematic scalar labels onto the participants and the policy processes they were describing. However, as I scrutinised how my participants were describing the policy work they were doing I found myself constantly returning to the idea of scale. Guided by the post-structuralist human geography literature, I increasingly began to appreciate that scale was an instrumental meaning-making device for them; participants gave order to their thoughts and justified their choices through adopting arguments about a vertical hierarchy of space. Although scale did not objectively 'exist' my participants were 'thinking through scale' as they went about doing their policy work, and in light of this I decided that these scalar practices were important to interrogate further.

The Structure of Analysis and Coding

Structuring my analysis of scalar practices was guided by the way in which my participants imagined scale. Participants distinguished between three scales: national, local authority and individual academy when they reflected on the academies policy. While interviewees drew links between all three of these scales, the local authority and school scales were consistently constructed in relation to each other and therefore Chapter 6 explores both these scales together. I had initially planned for Chapter 6 to discuss how the 'local' is constructed but soon realised that participants regarded the local authority and individual schools as being distinct; to discuss these as 'the local' would mean I would be imposing a scalar category on the empirical data which did not reflect how my participants made sense of their worlds. Chapter 5 focuses on the construction of a 'national' scale as this was more clearly separated from the other two scales in participants' accounts. I acknowledge that separating these constructions of scale draws a false boundary between participants' scalar

constructions as their policy worlds were collectively constructed by all three scales. However, I considered this to be a necessary division to make to provide clarity in my analysis; Chapters 7 and 8 also aim to overcome this by discussing the practice of scalecraft across the empirical material.

I approached the process of coding and classifying the interview data in such a way that paid attention to the interpretations and meanings of participants rather than looking for the direct use of a particular set of words. In Chapter 5, my analysis did not identify and code ‘national scale’ by exclusively considering any instance that actors uttered the word “national”. Instead, analysis took an interpretive approach to understand the ‘national’ as being associated with a particular socio-spatial ordering which is embodied by a range of categories and concepts. For example, ‘central government’, the ‘Department for Education’ and ‘Ofsted’ are categories and institutions which actors use when they are referring to a general idea of a national scale. Although analysis coded these categories as being part of scalar constructions of the ‘national’, it does acknowledge that policy actors will not always use these categories in the same way or to necessarily refer to the ‘national’. Coding the ‘individual academy’ and ‘local authority’ scales for the analysis presented in Chapter 6 followed the same approach. Thus, the decision to classify policy actors’ scalar epistemologies was made by continually considering the wider context of their descriptions of policy implementation and *not* through automatically coding particular categories as referring to a particular scale. Maintaining Moore’s (2008) emphasis on understanding scale as a category of *practice*, the categories grouped under the scalar construction of national, local authority or individual academy were not seen as *naturally* occupying this scale; instead, the categories are only grouped together because the policy actors themselves use them in such a way that indicates that they understand them to occupy a similar position in their scalar hierarchy.

Chapters 5 and 6 discuss the scalar practices of Northwestern and Eastshire separately in order to clearly convey how scale is constructed in each case. Within each case study the main characteristics of scalar practices are discussed in themes which I developed after coding interviews according to ‘national’, ‘local authority’ or ‘individual academy’ scalar constructions. Interview participants’ accounts are discussed according to their professional group (for example, local authority officer or academy principal) – processes of meaning-

making and the nature of policy work tended to coagulate around these participant groups. The exception to this is the case of Eastshire where the reflections of academy principals and academy chairs of governors are discussed jointly; I found that there was overwhelming overlap between the accounts of these two groups which can be explained by the fact that principals and chairs of governors were in constant cooperation with each other during the process of academy conversion and therefore were jointly constructing their interpretations of academies.

Chapters 5 and 6 are heavily empirical and I have included quotations as a way of illustrating overarching themes and typical experiences; if a quotation reflects an account which is either unusual or an exception I have clearly indicated this. I attempted to include an even selection of quotations from different interviewees however some participants – particularly in the case of local authority officers – were quoted more than others in relation to certain issues due to these individuals sometimes having exclusive responsibility over certain aspects of policy work.

Chapter 7 reflects on the empirical findings of Chapters 5 and 6 and develops the theoretical idea of ‘scalecraft’ and its wider implications for understanding policy. More specifically, it discusses how scalar practices have involved the mobilisation of the three concepts of ‘the state’, ‘market’ and ‘community’ through the practice of scalecraft to expose the underlying politics of these practices. I derived these concepts abductively from the themes which had emerged in the empirical chapters, a process which I explain in greater detail in Chapter 7.

Summary

In this chapter I have conveyed the personal and intellectual journey through which this thesis has come into fruition. By justifying and making transparent my research design and analysis I have demonstrated how my project has been crafted on strong intellectual foundations; having established this I can now move to presenting my empirical findings which focus on the scalar practices which policy actors deployed as they engaged in the process of implementing academies.

CHAPTER 5

Constructing the National Scale

This chapter focuses on how interview participants constructed a ‘national’ scale when they discussed their policy work. The discussion explores the scalar practices embedded in the construction of the national as a way of understanding how actors used this scalar category to interpret and strategically frame the academies policy. Scalar practices in Northwestern and Eastshire are examined separately in order to relate the empirical data to its situated context.

Constructing the National in Northwestern

The section which follows describes the key ways Northwestern policy actors mobilised the notion of a national scale. The following three themes most strongly characterised actors’ constructions of the national: the national as being disconnected and distant from Northwestern, actors being under national scrutiny and pressure, and the national as something which can be actively managed by Northwestern actors. The discussion aims to highlight the complex representational and strategic practices deployed by policy actors.

The National as Disconnected and Distant from Policy Actors

A key way in which Northwestern actors constructed the national scale was by emphasising how they felt it was disconnected from their own experiences of policy and how it was physically distant from Northwestern. Principals, sponsors and local authority officers all articulated how they considered the national policy narrative of academies to be different from their own interpretations and experiences of academies. The following quotations are typical examples of how principals distanced themselves from the national academies narrative:

But you can't get away from the word *academy* has a certain *cachet* or *brand* associated *with* it that starts people looking at you quite cynically. [...] going to a high school heads meeting, now, as a head of an academy, you feel, you *do feel* like Lord Voldemort. [...] I think, the academy *brand* has this, going back to Lord Voldemort,

has this kind of, it's almost as if people don't actually look at what it's trying to *achieve*, they look at it as someone trying to *steamroller*. (NW-P3)

Actually I think there's a bit of mythology about that that is, that is unfair. What are we? Yes, we're an academy, but actually we want to be an *outstanding school*. [...] I don't *see* myself as having my DNA removed by the academy machine. (NW-P3)

at the time academies were anathema to a lot of maintained schools [...] I just think there was a lot of *fear* really. (NW-P4)

The above quotations underline how principals in Northwestern perceive an image of academies that has been constructed on a national scale which they do not feel is representative of their own experiences and aims in implementing the academies policy. This is emphasised in relation to how other (non-academy) schools in Northwestern reacted to academies – other schools became fearful of academies due to the national ‘brand’ and ‘mythology’. There is thus a frustration expressed by academy principals over the disconnect between how they have been labelled by local schools according to the national academies narrative, and their own experience of running an academy. Principals have reacted to this by actively emphasising the distance between themselves and the national scale.

Similarly to academy principals in Northwestern, sponsors did not necessarily relate to what they perceived as the national narrative of the academies policy. Indeed, two sponsors described how they initially rejected the idea of becoming an academy sponsor when the initiative was first suggested to them by the Northwestern City Council:

academies...jarred with that [the sponsor business vision] at the time. Because it felt that they [academies] were being taken out of local authority control. And we...said ‘no’ in the first instance. And said ‘no, we’re not going to do academies, we want to work with schools’. (NW-S1)

At that time academy sponsors, there was a particular type, you put your £2 million in and you get a new name on the building and all those sorts of things – that wasn’t us. [...] It just didn’t attract us because we had a perception of what an academy sponsor was [...] (NW-S4)

The sponsor in the first quotation above rejected the proposal to get involved with academies on the basis that they understood the national vision of academies to involve changing the meaning of schools by disconnecting them from their local authority. The second quotation reveals how a different sponsor initially rejected academy sponsorship due

to associating academies with a national narrative of financial investment and the promotion of sponsors' brands. Thus, both these sponsors argue their initial negativity towards the idea of becoming a sponsor was due to understanding the national academies policy vision as being incongruent with their own priorities. Importantly, these sponsors' *rejection* of the national vision for academies reveals how these actors approach the national as something which they can engage with on their own terms.

One sponsor's description of negotiations relating to complications with an academy's finances highlighted that the national scale is imagined as being nested in a particular geographical location – London:

We had to take our managing Director down [to London] for an hour's meeting at 4:30 one day, erm, and...and it was *very, very* London-centric – we couldn't get people to come up, you know. The issues and the challenges were *here* yet we had to do all the travelling to London.

[...]

Once you drop to that level which is one level below the Sanctuary Buildings level, you know, we have somebody who understands the business [...] the local Department or the Department in xxxx [location of regional Department office] have been very supportive but once it goes *one level up*, or a couple of levels up, *into* the central London, erm [...] National policy *isn't* interpreted well into [the] local level [...] (NW-S3)

These quotations serve to highlight how the sponsor's understandings of the policy implementation process are strikingly based on the notion of a vertical hierarchy of scale. Sanctuary Buildings and the Department are understood by the sponsor to be at the level furthest away from the "issues and the challenges" of the academy. For the sponsor, the distance between Northwestern and the national scale is demonstrated by meetings being held in London instead of the location of the academy. This material separation of scales is also understood to result in a scalar separation of knowledge related to the process of policy implementation. In other words, national policymakers are perceived as unable to understand the nature of the issues being faced by an academy due to being on a different scale and occupying a different geographical territory. Importantly, the sponsor also suggests that national actors are *unwilling* to try and develop a nuanced understanding of contexts further down the scalar hierarchy. Here, materiality and scalar practices are

mutually shaping – the meaning of ‘London’ cannot be separated from the national scale and the meaning of ‘the national’ is embedded in the geographical location of London.

Local authority officers also emphasised how they perceived a disconnect between the national scale and their own perspectives in relation to the policy narrative of ‘local authority control’. The latter phrase has been consistently present in national policy rhetoric to explain the solution being offered by academy status. The underlying argument of the national policy narrative is that by becoming an academy a school benefits from being ‘removed’ from local authority control. The following quotations emphasise the sense of frustration Northwestern officers expressed towards this national narrative:

It was *very little* to do with this ‘local authority control’, which erm, to most of us didn’t exist, it doesn’t exist. [...] I can’t imagine anyone saying, “oh we’re *escaping* from local authority *control*” – I think that is a *myth* that’s put about. (NW-LA2)

at the moment that's one of the big political things, you know, be an academy and be away from the local authority, *out* of its control. (NW-LA5)

to argue that local authorities have *controlled* schools, and it makes me laugh – we never controlled them before let alone now [...] You know, it was just, erm, we were *responsible* at the local authority level for their, erm, performance. And I used to find that difficult with [Northwestern City Council] members because quite often members would say to me, ‘why don't you just tell them to *stop* it? It's not quite like that!’ (NW-LA6)

Framing the academies policy as an escape from ‘local authority control’ is seen by Northwestern officers as a ‘myth’ or ‘political’ argument that has no correlation with their own policy realities. The above quotations indicate a frustration towards national policymakers framing the policy in this way and a sense that national policy narratives can be persistent regardless of whether they hold true further down the scalar hierarchy. Officers constructing the national scale in this way emphasises an enduring sense of disconnect between their own understandings of policy and how academies have been framed at the national level.

Scrutiny and Pressure from the National Scale

An additional key way in which the national was characterised in Northwestern was to describe it as a scale that was the source of scrutiny and ‘top-down’ pressure. Academy principals in Northwestern often referred to an intense scrutiny coming from the national

scale, both at the planning stages of an academy as well as after its opening. The following accounts are examples of how principals described a ‘national’ presence prior to their academies opening:

through my interview panel there were representatives of the DfE [...] So there was, you know I think it was in partnership [with Northwestern sponsors] but then nevertheless there was a voice on the recruitment process from, from the highest levels there. (NW-P2)

We had to go down and do our, I'd call it a *viva* almost, we had to go down, before we were signed off we had to go down and answer quite an intense interview session down at, erm, down in London with the Department. We were given, we had a project steering group, we had people appointed as consultants who were ex-head teachers who had to sign off my curriculum, had to sign off, you know, we had to go down and prove we knew what we were doing. So we had to *pass* an interview in effect before we were allowed to open. And then they sent an inspection team who came and inspected the school building and put me through another interview again before we were allowed to open it to children. (NW-P3)

The Department, London, government and civil servants are all conceptualised as being at the ‘highest levels’ of principals’ hierarchical ordering of space. The above quotations demonstrate an understanding of the national as needing to be convinced that the policy is being implemented in a satisfactory manner and a national stamp of approval being an unwaveringly essential thing to have in order to be able to continue on to actually becoming an academy. In addition, the way in which NW-P3 describes needing to “convince government that you knew what you were doing” conveys a sense of disconnect between the sporadic evaluation of policy implementation from the national and the long-term implementation work being done by principals. While principals had been working on planning their academies for months they articulate how they felt they needed to prove from scratch that they were competent to open an academy and this suggests a lack of rapport and trust between themselves and national policymakers. Importantly, the national scale is discussed in such a way that suggests it has a physical presence, and that it is located in a separate geographical area to their own: London. Thus, the national is constructed by principals at this stage of implementation as having to be satisfied and being the only level at which the final ‘go ahead’ can be given for academy opening.

Principals also emphasised feeling under national scrutiny and pressure once their academies had opened. Indeed, this was the most strongly emphasised representation of the national scale.

at least two of the academies who have gone in, through Ofsted have gone into categories have got the DfE crawling all over them at the moment particularly with regard to funding. Erm, so it's not something you take lightly, that I think that if things *do*, erm, not work out well I've no doubt whatsoever about the clout coming from education funding [being received from central government] rather than from the local authority but I suspect the clout is *more* [for academies], that direct link, yeah. (NW-P4)

we're in a massively vulnerable position with Ofsted. (NW-P2)

I would say that, alright, we're directly accountable to central government and that's where we get our money from, that's where we get, erm, we're monitored, particularly financially and audit et cetera and that's more intense than it used to be. But actually I can't think [sighs] I would have thought that any school is accountable to central government. I think particularly in the, in the current climate with, you know, Sir Michael Wilshaw [the head of Ofsted] and Michael Gove, I can't, I don't think anyone should consider themselves, if anyone feels they are not under *intense* scrutiny then they're being a little bit naive I think. (NW-P3)

Northwestern principals articulate an intense scrutiny emanating from the national scale in these quotations, which they overwhelmingly associate with the Ofsted inspectorate as well as the DfE. Importantly, two of the comments above argue that the 'clout' and intensity of this scrutiny is more strongly felt by an academy compared to a school that is accountable to its local authority. This national scrutiny is described as being uncompromising, powerful and threatening to the survival of academies and as a result creates the sense that Northwestern principals feel vulnerable and fearful of the national scale. The implications for implementation of this scalar epistemology is that principals feel that satisfying the criteria set out by the national scale is the only route to ensure the survival of their academies.

The notion of a national scale exerting 'top-down' governance was also present in sponsors' accounts of their policy work. These actors focused on situations where they received directives from actors or institutions at the top of the scalar hierarchy which were of an uncompromising and commanding nature. The following quotations are examples of the types of situation where sponsors described the national in this manner:

The thing that was *profound* was that we were invited to open the school a year earlier than we wished to in the predecessor school and that *really* worried me. I wasn't sure we'd have the impact in the old facility but we were told - and this is maybe you need to be, erm, aware of how this is put in the report - but if we didn't open early we would close. *Forever*. There was no option, it was either open early in the old school or, 'thank you, but no thank you'.

NP: Why, why was that?

Because they had not got time to wait for the new build to finish. They were insistent on us making an impact earlier. (NW-S2)

And one of the issues we had, erm, with central academy policy was that ever since we've been assessed from September 2009, which was a very challenging environment, a very challenging school, academy, and our rate of progress has always been assessed *wrongly*, we feel, from the day in which it [the academy] opened in the old building. And our rate of progress in the old building was hampered by the fact that we had all the transition and issues with the building etc, etc. And yet the Department gave *no*, erm, gave no allowance for that at all. We were told initially in 2008 that this would be a *five-year* turnaround [pause] and immediately that we opened we were told that it was a *one-year* turnaround. [...] One year to get up to national levels. [...] There was *no* allowance given whatsoever, erm, for the fact that we opened in an old building. (NW-S3)

the Ofsted inspector seemed to have [a] really closed mind and because we don't have any national statistics yet [...] we haven't got results in their eyes (NW-S5)

[...] we always felt that there wasn't a level playing field, erm, that we weren't consulted, that we were *told* (NW-S3)

Sponsors discuss the 'national scale' as being directive and uncompromising in relation to a wide range of situations. In the first two quotations both sponsors received an instruction by the DfES to open their academy earlier than planned, which meant that the academy opened in the old building of the school it was replacing. NW-S2 underlines how this was framed not as a request but as an ultimatum – the academy would either be opened early or not be permitted to open at all. This is described as a “profound” and “really worrying” situation for the sponsor at the time, therefore the decision made by the DfES – the national scale – is framed here as being unwavering in the face of sponsor concerns.

The early opening of a different academy is criticised by NW-S3 in the second quotation due to the Department giving “no allowance” for the associated disruption and difficulties of opening in an old building and transferring to a new site after the first year. In addition to this, the sponsor expresses frustration at the number of years the academy was given to reach national attainment levels – it shifted from a five-year turnaround period to one year.

Once again, the national scale is represented here as giving firm directions to sponsors without making any concessions for difficulties faced by individual cases.

In the third quotation above, a different sponsor describes an Ofsted inspector as being ‘close-minded’ due to having an outlook where ‘results’ are exclusively defined according to national scale criteria. The sponsor argues that the academy has been making educational improvements and therefore this should constitute a ‘result’, however an Ofsted inspector is unable or unwilling to recognise this due to focusing solely on national definitions of what constitutes a ‘result’. The final quotation illustrates a sponsor once again characterising actors at the national scale as being instructive and uncompromising. Thus, sponsors deploy scalar practices when describing a range of situations to highlight how they have felt instructed and directed by the ‘national’ in an uncompromising manner.

Actively Managing the National

Using National Policy to Pursue Northwestern Scalar Interests

When discussing the academies policy, Northwestern officers emphasised how they chose to engage with the policy in such a way that advanced a pre-existing local authority priority. The latter related to addressing a gap between the skills of the Northwestern population and the skills demanded by the biggest employers in the Northwestern area. Closing this skills gap had been defined as one of Council members’ (and thus officers’) most pressing priorities. When the national academies programme was launched, Northwestern officers described in their interviews how they interpreted this as an opportunity for achieving their vision for the city by encouraging academy sponsorship to be taken on by the area’s major employers and by the development of a Northwestern variant of the policy. In addition to this, Northwestern officers explained how the academies policy in Northwestern was closely related to incentives related to the *Building Schools for the Future* (BSF) policy. The policy environment was set up in such a way that if a local authority engaged with the academies policy then it would also be able to qualify for BSF investment. Northwestern officers describe their deliberations around this issue in the following way:

the city was determined to take advantage of the capital investment in *Building Schools for the Future* and the whole BSF programme [...] And enthusiastic engagement with the academies conversion program meant that every single high

school in Northwestern, and every special school in Northwestern was rebuilt under the BSF programme. (NW-LA4)

what was happening was that the national government wanted a policy of implementing two things: *Building Schools for the Future* and increasing the performance of schools that were under what they called their floor targets. Northwestern had an enormous number of, proportion of secondary schools that were struggling to achieve the targets set by central government, erm... So as xxxx [job title] I've got to work out how to get the best deal for the city and its children within the context of...central government pressure. (NW-LA5)

we accessed that [BSF] money by putting in the government's hands a *different, but*, a way of delivering academies, otherwise we weren't going to get the money. And we needed the money to build the schools, to have schools – nobody thinks the money is just enough, *obviously*, and nobody thinks that building a nice new school does the trick, but what does do the trick is that combination with good teachers, good learning, you know, good curriculum, good heads, all that stuff. So we had many reasons to somehow, you know, scratch our way through this situation. (NW-LA6)

It is immediately apparent that a particular scalar epistemology shaped how Northwestern officers made sense of the policy environment which led to the development of the Northwestern Model of academies. Local authority officers regarded the national policy environment as a means through which to serve the needs of the Northwestern metropolitan area; the latter scale is framed as officers' only policy priority. Thus, the national scale is understood as setting up a particular policy environment – in this situation one of putting pressure on local authorities whose schools are not achieving national targets, offering BSF money, and promoting the academies policy – and that this is something to be strategically and selectively used to further the Northwestern priorities as far as possible. Importantly, embracing the academies policy in order to receive BSF money was not part of the dominant national policy narrative around academies. The deliberations of Northwestern officers reveal how these actors were able to implement policy in such a way that achieved a different set of aims to those suggested by the national scale. Local authority officers made no attempt to conceal how they had pursued the academies policy in such a way that did not conform to the national narrative. On the contrary, officers demonstrated pride in being able to best serve the interests of their city and stay actively involved in this.

Negotiating with the National

Northwestern officers all placed the aims of the City Council at the heart of the implementation of the academies policy and noted that national policy aims of the academies programme were always secondary to their own agendas. This was usually expressed very bluntly, as demonstrated in the following comment:

you only have to mention a few times as an officer, 'well the government wants it' and our [Council] members would say, 'I'm not bothered what the government wants'. You know, or words to that effect, you know, 'well we'll do it differently in Northwestern'. After about three years of this, I thought, 'I *get* this, you know, never mind what *they're* [central government] doing, that's...' [...] So I, I realised that approach and I always said to my staff, to my senior team, '*don't say* things in reports, because I'll take them out, you know, like 'the government *wants* this', because Northwestern doesn't really *care*.' Sorry, that's probably a bit brutal but it *doesn't* really, it's doing some *complex political behaviour*, you know. (NW-LA6)

This local authority officer emphasises the brazen attitude of Northwestern City Council members when they openly state that they are unconcerned with satisfying national demands and how they are instead driven by their own agendas relating to Northwestern. The quotation also emphasises a crucial aspect of this attitude towards the national scale: Northwestern's willingness and confidence to 'do things differently.' It is precisely this confidence to challenge the national and pursue different avenues to implementing policy which underpinned the development of the Northwestern Academies Model.

Officers' negotiations around the Northwestern Academies Model also reflected a similar construction of the national scale. One interviewee held the position of lead officer in the implementation of the Northwestern Model. The way in which this officer described negotiations with the Department reveals important insights about the scalar practices being deployed by Northwestern officers.

I suppose the dynamic was to work the model out ourselves but then, if you like, we had to bend the government's model. So, they had certain tenets in their model, and some of them weren't going to suit. (NW-LA6)

So we were in almost a perpetual negotiation with the Department for Children, Schools and Families because they didn't, they first of all didn't think we'd get corporate sponsors, then we sort of needed to bend the admissions policy – and I can remember some quite *confrontational*, not *confrontational*, well, confrontational would be the wrong word, nobody *shouted* at anybody, but I can remember in my office in the Town Hall some really scratchy meetings with the DfE because we

were bending the model [...] the officials were giving us *big, hard* times over stuff. (NW-LA6)

NP: What about, in that dialogue with the DfE –

Whatever it was then, 'the officials'.

NP: Yeah, erm, what was their attitude towards Northwestern City Council being a co-sponsor?

They didn't like it, because they thought that was us, erm [pause] they basically thought that was us still trying to be 'local authority control'. (NW-LA6)

These descriptions articulate how negotiations over the Northwestern Model were driven by very particular scalar practices. Northwestern officers' attitudes towards the 'national scale' reveal a strong conviction that the national can be challenged and made to concede over how a policy is implemented. The first quotation refers to how certain parts of the national academies model "weren't going to suit" the aims of Northwestern and its City Council and therefore the national model would need to be 'bent'; instead of conforming to national prescriptions, Northwestern officers decided to challenge and modify them. Despite the DCSF disagreeing with the Northwestern Model and the difficulties of negotiating how this Northwestern variant of the academies policy was going to be implemented, Northwestern officers did not compromise on any of the major tenets of the Model and eventually achieved clearance from policymakers at the national scale. Thus, scalar practices deployed by Northwestern officers represented the Department and central government – the national scale – as being open to persuasion and challenge which intersected with officers' drive to modify national policy in order to best suit the needs of Northwestern.

This scalar outlook of Northwestern officers is linked to a particular understanding of the relationship between Northwestern and the national scale.

this is absolutely critical to this as well – we were a big city in the government's kind of back door cake if you know what I mean (NW-LA6)

I became aware really that it was the quality of the relationship between Northwestern and the government that made it happen. I don't know, well, I don't know, I'm not in a position to say, but I don't know that they would have taken it from anybody else really. But what Northwestern's leadership was saying was, you know, they are a flagship city, Northwestern, for a Labour government (NW-LA6)

we got other cities coming to us like Leeds and saying, "how have you done *this?*" [...] And I kept getting invited to events to talk about it by local authorities and trying to tread my language quite carefully but after a while I just said, 'look, you know, we bent the model, we just bent it.' You know, it was like that [holds out straightened hand] and we just went, plop [bends hand]. (NW-LA6)

These comments reveal that the implementation of academies is understood as being inextricably linked to specific dynamics between Northwestern and the national scale. There is a conviction that Northwestern is a city area which was symbolically important to the New Labour government that was in power at the time of the negotiations. Indeed, there is a suggestion that this scalar dynamic was so unique that Northwestern was the *only* city for which the government would have made such significant concessions. Scaled understandings of the implementation process are central to how the academies policy has been understood and related to by Northwestern officers and how they have justified their development of the Northwestern Academies Model.

Summary

Interviews with policy actors in Northwestern have revealed how they make sense of their policy work by developing particular understandings of a 'national' scale. All actors felt national policy and policymakers were disconnected from their own understandings of academies and their experiences of implementing the policy. A key scalar practice deployed by actors was therefore the construction of *boundaries* between themselves and the national scale. Importantly, these practices intersected with arguments that the national scale was physically separate and distant from the Northwestern context. This highlights how scalar practices interlink with perceptions of materiality when actors interpret their social worlds.

A further issue which was articulated by academy principals and sponsors was that they felt under intense national scrutiny and pressure. National guidelines and rules relating to the implementation of academies were described as very rigid and a source of frustration for Northwestern principals and sponsors. A key representation of national policymakers was that they were unwilling or unable to consider the specific context of Northwestern. Once again, this exposes how scalar practices created boundaries between actors and the national scale. Furthermore, principals and sponsors' scalar practices emphasised this boundary to reflect an existing *tension* between their own priorities and those of the national scale. For

Northwestern principals and sponsors scale delineates the boundaries of power, with their priorities being suppressed by the national scale.

In contrast to experiencing national scrutiny, officers working in Northwestern City Council adopted scalar practices in their policy work which reflected how they attempted to actively manage the national scale. The development of the Northwestern Academies Model is a clear manifestation of scalar practices which have shifted the emphasis away from academies as a national policy to academies serving the interests of Northwestern. In addition, officers discussed how they approached the academies policy as an opportunity through which they could also take advantage of BSF funding and framed this as being complementary to the needs of Northwestern rather than supporting the national policy vision. Officer accounts of negotiations with national policymakers underline how officers attempted to actively change and modify national policy to their own advantage. An important element to the success of these negotiations was officers carrying out their policy work with an attitude which regarded the national as something which could be challenged and made to concede. While scalar practices constructed a boundary between Northwestern and the national scale here, officers also deployed scalar practices as a way of *shifting* emphasis away from the national policy narrative to the issue of how academies could serve the interests of Northwestern. In addition, it is clear that a further scalar practice underlying negotiations over the Northwestern Model was to emphasise the *interrelated* nature of scale. This was underlined by officers describing the importance of Northwestern to national actors as well as understanding national policy to hold opportunities for Northwestern.

Constructing the National in Eastshire

The chapter will now turn to describing how the national scale has been mobilised by policy actors in Eastshire. Three themes have been found to characterise Eastshire actors' constructions of the national: the disconnected and distant nature of the national scale, schooling being part of a national marketplace and the national as something which drives change. The discussion explores these themes in detail to reveal what kinds of scalar practices are embedded in actors' interpretations and strategies.

The National as Disconnected and Distant

All Eastshire actors constructed the national scale as being disconnected and distant in relation to their own experiences of working with academies. Principals and chairs of governors gave meaning to the ‘national’ as something which was at the top of the scalar hierarchy and therefore physically distant from themselves. The following quotations serve to highlight this:

And there was just that little moment that the [academy] Head had when he was thinking about who to call, the first person to call, who was he going to call for help and support? Was it going to be the local authority? But will they turn round and say, “get stuffed, you’re an academy”? Or was it the, the EFA [Education Funding Agency], in which case you’re talking about talking to nameless people on the end of the phone who may be many miles away and not in a practical position to help and who don’t know you anyway? (E-P1)

there is no way that the EFA can have the slightest idea about what’s going on in most academies. Erm, and cannot *possibly* have responsibility for that number of schools, I think it was just an over-ambitious idea [...] I mean they’re *there* and we’re right over *here*. I just can’t see that that’s going to go anywhere. (E-P1)

if your roof falls in as an *academy* you can apply to the DfE, but of course that's a much more *remote* beast than somebody half a mile down the road as they are in xxxx [area of Eastshire in which academy is located] that I *know*. (E-P3)

The DfE don't know best about how to improve *my school*. Other people in very similar contexts who've had success probably know better than the DfE. And other people who know the local context can come and help me [are] *better* than somebody in central government. And that principle applies whether you're an academy or not. (E-P3)

When it comes to the question of an academy needing assistance or advice, the above quotations illustrate that the national scale is not considered to be the best port of call. Firstly, the national is imagined as being physically distant from these Eastshire interviewees; it is described as being “many miles away” and being ‘there’ as opposed to ‘over here’. Related to this is the notion of the national scale being *impersonal* – this is communicated particularly in the first quotation above where national actors are described as “nameless people” who do not know who the Eastshire principal is. Representing the national scale as physically distant from the reality of Eastshire actors is accompanied by a scalar practice which frames the national as having scale-specific knowledge which is different to that of principals and governors. Eastshire actors reflect on how they consider the Education Funding Agency and DfE to be unaware of the individual circumstances of

an academy and the local context of which it is a part. Thus, the following two framings of the national scale are interlinked in the scalar practices of Eastshire principals and governors: firstly, the national scale as being physically distant from Eastshire actors and, secondly, understandings that different kinds of knowledge inform the policy implementation process and that these types of knowledge are distinctly *scaled*.

The Coalition government's approach to academies was to continue promoting New Labour's policy narrative that academy status is an opportunity for schools to 'free' themselves from problematic 'local authority control'. Local authority officers in Eastshire consistently expressed frustration at this national framing of the relationship between local authorities and schools. The following accounts are typical:

[sighs] I think it [the academies policy] is trying to fix a problem that there was in the system [pause] 15, 16 years ago? But I think the difficulty is that there's a perception at Whitehall – and I know because I was *there* [laughs slightly] – there was a perception that LAs [local authorities] had more control and more erm...hands-on involvement with schools – particularly secondaries – than they've had for 10 years. So it's, for me, it's a policy line that's been to fix a problem that was historical that had changed *anyway*. (E-LA3)

also I think there's a misperception that schools don't *want* the local authority [...] you know, there's 30 academy Heads [in Eastshire] saying, 'no, we *still* see a role for the local authority, we'd quite like you to lead this because we don't think we've got the capacity, the time nor in some ways – some of them were saying – 'the real *focus* to be able to do that, and *actually* we think you add value to it.' But I think the national government view is, you know, local authorities *shouldn't* be doing that, self-led improvement should happen on its own (E-LA3)

I think that there's a national rhetoric about local authorities which is getting in the way there, and that's what you're seeing in that sort of rhetoric. I think that actually local authorities haven't got in the way for many years with many schools. Erm, so, it is, it is making them, putting them up, as I say, holding them up to account in a much clearer way without a local authority interface in between. And I think, so I think, why does he, why does Michael Gove make a great deal of that? For me it is about... The marketplace. Erm, and a much greater focus on the agency of schools as opposed to the agency of local government's accountability mechanism. Erm, [sighs] and I think a lot of that is political. And a lot of that frankly is not *real*. (E-LA6)

Officers argue that the contention that local authorities have too much control over schools and that schools do not want to work with local authorities is being produced specifically at the national scale. Both E-LA3 and E-LA6 are officers who have previously worked in

Sanctuary Buildings and they both articulate a distinction between national rhetoric about local authorities and the ‘reality’ that they experience by occupying a different position on the scalar hierarchy. By discussing the issue of local authority control in this way, Eastshire officers deploy scalar practices which emphasise their knowledge and understanding of policy implementation as being disconnected from the way in which the policy is discussed at the national scale.

Similar to principals and chairs of governors, Eastshire officers also emphasised a physical disconnect existing between themselves and the top of the scalar hierarchy.

sometimes we’re entirely...you know, we are as one with the Department for Education about what needs to be done with particular schools. But sometimes we have to dilute what they want to do and...

NP: And why do you have to dilute it?

Well, sometimes the, they, the solution that they, they...might jump to from a desk in London without understanding any local context or history or what’s going on on the ground might not work. (E-LA1)

I think it’s probably, I think there is, erm, an inevitability – I used to do it, I used to deliver national programmes – in that some of the finite, day-to-day *detail* is not understood at Sanctuary Buildings because...most of us there have been away from it for a few years – it isn’t for the first year or so that you’re there, but then actually as policy changes, as funding streams change you become a bit, and you think, ‘oh, that’s fine, what would be the problem with that?’ [pause] I think the difference is that the Department used to have an awful lot of staff with an education background [pause] – that has been *totally decimated* and so there are *very few* people [pause] that they’re very bright civil servants there, lots of my colleagues and friends that I’ve worked with for years [smiles], who, but they do two years at the Home Office, they do two years, you know, fast-track graduates absolutely, Oxbridge, stunning intellectuals [pause] however, you have to know, ‘d’ you know what? In a classroom that doesn’t work.’ (E-LA3)

Say you’ve got a serious problem with a contractor or supplier... you can immediately ring up somebody in xxxx [main offices of Eastshire] and if necessary that person can come out and see you and talk through that problem with you and, and solve it. Now, you can’t do that easily if your interlocutor is in Coventry or Gateshead or Barnsley or wherever their offices are, or London, because...your school is simply a school. The person there has no detail, no knowledge of the context or the environment of your particular school. And so it is, it is remote control rather than...local, local support. (E-LA2)

These quotations illustrate that embedded within a perception of a disconnect existing between scales is an emphasis on a *material, geographical* distance existing between different levels of the scalar hierarchy. A desk in London, Sanctuary Buildings, the Department for

Education, offices that are ‘elsewhere’ are not merely different geographical locations but they are conceptualised as different *scales* in the scalar practices of Eastshire officers. According to these scalar narratives, being located at the national scale leads to policymakers lacking an understanding of “local context or history”, what works “in a classroom” and the “day-to-day detail” of implementing policy. Importantly, Eastshire officers make sense of this disconnect in a manner that is typical of understanding the world as consisting of a vertical ordering of space. Central to this is a sense that the national is so ‘high up’ and broad-ranging that policymakers at this scale have a ‘low resolution’ image of policy implementation compared to local authority officers who are further down the scalar hierarchy and can understand the “detail” of what happens “on the ground”. Importantly, the first quotation above describes officers sometimes ‘diluting’ the recommendations of the DfE as a solution to this disconnect, which is one of the few occasions when Eastshire officers discuss their policy work as not being purely driven along by the national scale. Overall, the differences between officers’ own understandings of policy and those existing at the national scale were typically articulated as a frustration with national demands and recommendations.

The ‘Missing Scale’ of the Middle Tier

One of the most striking examples of how Eastshire officers base their understandings of policy implementation on imagining a vertical hierarchy of scale and a distant national scale is their description of a ‘middle tier’. The latter refers to the space ‘in between’ academies and the national which is perceived to have ‘opened up’ as a result of local authorities no longer being the mediating institution between these two scales. Two Eastshire officers discussed the middle tier in the following manner:

I think there is a little bit of a chink in government policy – David Laws did a speech recently where he actually said, ‘oh, we can’t control everything from Whitehall’ erm, [...] there’s a little bit of a chink and a recognition that actually, (a) ‘why would we want to control this, we don’t know the local context and it’s too big and it’s difficult,’ and I think there is a *little bit* of a policy shift, and the development of a middle tier, it seems to be back on the agenda and then it disappeared and now it seems to be back on the agenda a little bit. Obviously scaled back and very different but at least it’s been recognised that actually there *is* perhaps a need for a middle tier. (E-LA3)

I think we’ll see that middle tier emerge, erm, one way or another. [...] I think we’ll see... More chains of academies develop, erm...and... I think obviously – I’m not

sure we'll see much more in terms of policy development, I think the fascinating thing will be whether the DfE feels it can hold the line in terms of... Not interfering in the running of schools [...] you can see politically it's getting harder and harder for them to keep with the mantra that, 'actually this is about local decision-making and enabling headteachers'. So I think we'll start to see a push back [pause] erm...erm, from that. (E-LA5)

Not only do these descriptions about the need for a 'middle tier' expose how Eastshire officers understand their policy worlds in a distinctly scaled manner, but they also link to previously outlined arguments about how they understand the nature of the 'national'. The first quotation above re-visits the notion of the national scale being physically distant from other parts of the scalar hierarchy – Education Minister David Laws is perceived as realising that Whitehall “can’t control everything”, thus creating the idea that the national scale occupies a distant physical space. The same Eastshire officer links this idea of a physically distant national scale to the notion that the kinds of knowledge contained within the national are also distinct and that they lack insight into the “local context”. The second officer quoted above also reveals how the middle tier will be necessary in order to prevent the DfE “interfering in the running of schools”. The middle tier is thus discussed as though it is currently a ‘missing scale’ that needs to be re-introduced in order for the education system’s governance structure to run more effectively. Without the middle tier Eastshire officers argue that the national scale is unable to cope with all academies being nationally accountable and also that the absence of a mediating scale has the potential to make the national scale interfere too strongly in ‘local’ decision-making. Thus, the issue of the middle tier reveals how Eastshire officers comprehend policy implementation through scalar practices; they regard implementation as a process which passes through a hierarchy of scale and argue that implementation would benefit from having a mediating level between the top and bottom of this scalar hierarchy.

A Sense of Accountability

During interviews, Eastshire principals and chairs of governors were asked to explain what the implications were of becoming ‘directly accountable to central government’ as a result of their academy status. All responses to this question revealed how interviewees did not consider this to be a particularly meaningful relationship of accountability with the national scale. The latter became apparent when interviewees articulated understanding and experiencing the ‘national scale’ as something distant and unfamiliar. Principals and

governors also emphasised how they considered national scrutiny to be unnecessary in light of their academies already demonstrating a high level of educational performance. The following comments are typical:

I don't know *what* that means. I, I don't know, because I [pause] *who* am I accountable to in central government? Am I accountable to Michael Gove? *How* am I accountable to Michael Gove? [pause] you know, I feel more accountable to the parents, feel more accountable to the students [...] (E-P2)

I am attracted by the idea of total autonomy from the local authority and accountability to central government because everybody knows that that accountability is tenuous because if there are thousands of schools all accountable to the DfE then clearly the DfE has, it must have a very light touch approach, which they do – an *extraordinarily* light touch. [...] if the school had been a failing school then I think you do need a lot more support than the DfE / central government could give. (E-P3)

you know, as long as you don't get into any sort of category then [pause] the Secretary of State, Department for Education has no input into what you're doing and will leave you to get on with it. It's very much a hands off relationship *unless* things go wrong. (E-P4)

The above comments from academy principals indicate that they have no sense of personal responsibility towards the national scale despite recently becoming 'directly accountable' to it. The national scale is understood as something impersonal and faceless – for example, the principal in the first quotation emphasises this by wondering, "*who* am I accountable to in central government?" and instead describes having a greater sense of responsibility to the parents and students of the academy. The second and third quotations above indicate how the distant nature of the national scale is understood to be related to the high educational performance of these Eastshire converter academies. Provided that academies are not placed into an Ofsted category, the Secretary of State and DfE are described as leaving academies to "get on with it". In deploying scalar representations in this way, principals emphasise a distance between their own interpretations of academies and the national policy narrative of academies.

Suspicion Towards the National

An interesting issue which was raised by a number of Eastshire principals and chairs of governors was how they felt a sense of suspicion towards the national scale. The following comments are examples of this:

another concern I think was...erm...to do with the funding – was this just a sweetener to tempt us into conversion and would the funding then be withdrawn [pause] at a later stage? Was it all too good to be true? [...] So we were very suspicious about it and wondering, you know, what it is that we weren't seeing, you know? (E-P1)

I had some reservations and the main reservations were: would the funding that we expected to appear *actually* appear? That was one reservation. Because it looked on paper, it looked like we were going to do better. But until you actually get the money in your bank you're always worried. (E-P3)

It's, it's, you know, and that's, you could argue as well, erm, another *undemocratic* and, and *unsavoury* part of being [an academy], you know, you can go into it in the space of *weeks* but it will take you *seven years* to come out of it. And that in itself is a very interesting, you know, state of affairs that stages questions around '*why*'? *Why* would government want to make it so *difficult* for people to, you know... You can come out of a *marriage* quicker than that [laughs] it's like an old school Victorian marriage, isn't it? Anyway. (E-P2)

These comments from Eastshire principals all reveal a lack of trust in the national scale. The first two quotations underline how principals were unable to fully trust that they were going to receive the additional national funding which was promised to them. There is a sense that national incentives and rewards should be treated with caution and that they could be hiding something unsavoury. The third quotation above expresses a similar attitude towards national policymaking. This principal reveals an intense sense of suspicion by questioning the intentions behind making academy status so difficult for schools to reverse. Thus, another aspect of how the national has been framed in the scalar practices of Eastshire actors is that it should be treated with suspicion.

Operating in a National Marketplace

When the academies policy was first extended to high-performing schools by the Coalition government in 2010 there were substantial financial gains to be made from converting to academy status. Every Eastshire principal and chair of governors cited the financial advantages of converting to academy status as being the decisive factor or amongst the most important factors for choosing to participate in the policy initiative. Interviewees described these financial advantages as *incentives* intentionally set up at the national scale in order to encourage schools to convert to academy status. One chair of governors described the financial implications of academy status in the following way:

You know, the government *set it up* this way, they *set it up* so that every individual school had pretty strong incentive – like, like, you know, multi-tens of thousand pounds a year incentive – to become an academy. (E-G2)

like I say, it's all to do with the way the government sets up the playing field. If you set up the playing field in a particular way we'll all rush like lemmings towards the corn (E-G2)

These quotations are typical descriptions of how schools felt they were governed by national financial incentives that relate to converting to an academy. The national scale is described as 'setting up the playing field' which, in turn, determines the policy decisions of schools. This emphasises how actors perceive the existence of powerful top-down policy decisions which are directed at them in their location further down the scalar hierarchy. Furthermore, the way in which incentives are discussed suggests that these Eastshire actors understand themselves as being part of a kind of *marketplace* of schooling institutions. The academies are being incentivised (and, crucially, not *told*) to follow a certain policy direction, revealing how Eastshire actors deploy scale in such a way that they constantly consider their policy work in relation to operating in a national marketplace.

This notion of the 'national market' was highlighted further by the way Eastshire principals and chairs of governors described how financial incentives left them with *little choice* other than to convert. For example, one chair of governors stated:

when it became apparent, erm, that there was some financial advantage in the way budget allocations would work in becoming an academy, erm, we decided that we couldn't afford not to join the bandwagon. (E-G4)

The notion of existing in a wider national marketplace of schools is underlined here, with Eastshire actors feeling as though they are unable to act or choose their policy direction independently; they are instead governed by the financial incentives offered by the national scale. Another key focus of Eastshire principals and chairs of governors related to the issue of the national academy 'brand'. Academies in Eastshire gave serious consideration to what they understood to be a national policy narrative which asserted that being a 'converter academy' was an indication of being a high-achieving school. Although none of the interviewees presented this consideration as the main reason for converting to academy status, its importance was nonetheless consistently emphasised. For example:

The *reputation* of a school is important. Erm, and if an *academy* becomes...synonymous with high-achieving – which we suspected it would – that, you know, suddenly the Heads of academies would be seen as the Heads of the high-achieving schools [...] And there is a, there is a, you know [huffs] there is a kind of...unwritten, erm [pause] *pecking order* of schools nationally. (E-P1)

you know, we're a marketplace. Reputations grow [pause] on the basis of these things. Erm, you know. [pause] And, you know, [sighs] yeah. It takes, it takes a very [sighs] erm...well anyway, to pretend that doesn't exist would be naïve I think. (E-P1)

[there was] the sort of perception that since the best performing schools in Eastshire are becoming academies – and we consider ourselves to be a high-performing school – *we* ought to become an academy as well. I mean there was some marketing, you know...*edge* to, it was clear that there was some market-, at the least, or there was an *opportunity cost* of *not* becoming an academy in marketing terms. (E-G4)

there was a sense that good schools were becoming academies. Erm, it was just sort of out there in the ether. And therefore you can't help but feel, '*we're* a good school, we ought to become one too'. (E-P3)

This issue reveals how Eastshire principals and governors perceive policy narratives at the national scale to have an inevitable impact on their own reputations. No interviewee agreed with the national narrative which equated (converter) academy status with the best-performing schools. Despite this, they were resigned to the idea that they were unable to escape being labelled according to the assumptions of this very narrative. Thus, for these policy actors in Eastshire, policy narratives at the national scale are understood to be powerful and something which potentially carry important reputational risk.

At the heart of these deliberations over reputational risk, once again, lies the idea of a national 'marketplace' of schools. Scalar practices are being deployed in such a way that the national scale is equated with the concept of the market – discussing a “pecking order of schools” and academy status giving schools a ‘marketing edge’ are key examples of this. The effect of these representational practices is that Eastshire principals and governors imagine their school as being part of a national playing field, which forces them to consider their position in relation to the idea of a national marketplace. Despite the ‘rules of the market’ being described as “unwritten” and “out there in the ether,” they are still strong enough to govern the policy choices of these Eastshire actors. Describing Eastshire academies as being forced to compete in a national marketplace serves to further undermine the idea of

Eastshire academies having individual agency and choice as they are instead framed as being governed by the rules of the market.

However, the national scale was not always represented as something which forced Eastshire actors to make concessions. A number of interviewees discussed how the decision for their school to take on academy status was partly made by considering conversion as the best way through which to actively manage their relationship with the national. The following comments illustrate this:

this is the direction which the Secretary of State of education wants us to go, we're more likely to, if we play along, and we believe that most of the other secondary schools in the county are playing along, then, erm, erm... Then we're more likely to be in a position that is, that is favourable to us as far as the DfE's future policy is concerned. So it was this kind of, in a way it was a bit reactive. It wasn't really, oh, Michael Gove wants us all to think, 'yipee!' You know, 'we can sack staff and sell property' and I don't know what, but we weren't that much interested in all of that. (E-G2)

the, academies were very much, erm, the preferred direction of travel that was coming over quite clearly – not just with this government but in the previous government as well, it had been very much the case. (E-P1)

if you suddenly end up not in the premier league as it were, erm, then you would be making a very strong statement, that you had opted out of that. And that was *politically* dangerous. A politically dangerous place to position ourselves, that was after we had, you know, we were an outstanding school, you know, we were already *perceived* to be in that premier league and if we then didn't do that [convert] then how that would *position* us? So there was *that* argument, an interesting political positioning argument, but reputation's important in education, very, very important. (E-P1)

Even though the above quotations demonstrate the national scale being *reacted to*, this reaction is not simply described as a way of conforming with the desired policy direction of national government. It is a reaction which also attempts to manage national strategies in a way which best protects Eastshire actors' interests. The risk of being out of favour with national policymakers is being managed and considered here in order to achieve the best outcomes for the academies. The interviewees talk about “playing along” and “political[ly] positioning” themselves in a particular manner which indicates that they are adopting scalar practices which aim to manage relations with the national in such a way that maximises their individual advantage.

Once again, these deliberations over the political positioning of an academy are made through Eastshire actors reflecting on their position in the national marketplace. The choices of other secondary schools and the need to be in the national ‘premier league’ of schools are presented as key considerations for Eastshire actors. Thus, scalar practices emphasise how the choice to manoeuvre relations with ‘the national’ to the advantage of Eastshire academies is not one that is made independently; on the contrary, it is a decision which is governed by Eastshire actors’ understanding that they are operating in a marketplace and that they need to constantly evaluate how they can maintain a ‘competitive advantage’ over others.

Reacting to the National

Feeling Restricted by Uncertainty

Eastshire officers also emphasised the distance between themselves and the national scale in their accounts of how they have received national messages about the academies policy. All Eastshire officers experienced a sense of uncertainty and confusion over many aspects of academies. For example:

[...] there has been a lack of clarity from central government about...the details of the funding, and the LACSEG grant and, you know, how much and when and what does it entail and what services...will be funded by academies in the future and what funding would go to academies in the future. So we have suffered I suppose, I suppose all local authorities have suffered, that lack of clarity, so we knew, we knew it would have major implications for us. We couldn’t calculate precisely what they would be – and we’re still not entirely sure. (E-LA1)

The funding... Has just been sort of a nightmare from day one, both in terms of the local authority funding and what we've lost and what we haven't lost and we're *still getting* additional guidance by the day at the moment, in terms of the funding, so that, so that just seems *incredibly confused*. Erm, and issues such as admissions, appeals, exclusions, it just seems to me that the notion of academies, the strategic intent was set out in the Academies Act, the *detail* is almost being found out through case studies and as issues arise. (E-LA5)

Over time it’s become apparent that there is *no* national plan, in fact, Michael Gove’s quoted as saying “it *will* be a mess” and he likes it to be a mess [laughs slightly]. (E-LA3)

These quotations reveal how Eastshire officers associate a sense of uncertainty with a ‘top-down’ national drive to implement the academies policy at a fast pace. Officers argue that this has resulted in a lack of consideration about the detailed implications of reforms

further down the scalar hierarchy. Within these descriptions of uncertainty, there is a strong sense among Eastshire officers that their role and agency in the implementation process is to a great degree constrained by decisions made at the national scale. The national is therefore constructed as something to be *reacted to* and a level of policymaking which determines the direction of implementation; in this way Eastshire officers reveal that their scalar practices are underpinned by ideas of ‘top-down’ dynamics.

The National as the Driver of Change

The idea of the national scale *driving* the policy process is apparent throughout Eastshire officers’ accounts of their work. They represent the national in this manner when discussing the policy in general terms and not only in relation to the uncertainty they have felt about the policy direction of academies. The following comments are characteristic of this:

Well obviously it’s not our policy – it’s a national policy. (E-LA6)

You could say that it was the path of least resistance which was: it's the role of the schools’ governing body to make these decisions and the local authority wasn't going to locally facilitate, or negotiate on behalf of schools or nor was it going to oppose it. And I think we've seen quite a lot of examples of other authorities who have opposed it and made life a lot more difficult for themselves in terms of the Secretary of State throwing anything at them. (E-LA6)

I think for the DfE it's a numbers game. Erm... I mean they've made a virtue out of *not* setting out where it's heading to, it's evolutionary it's left to grow organically, erm, very purposefully and very deliberately. And of course they would say, the market, it's about choice, about central government not wanting to stifle innovation, etc. so they've got a strong rhetoric around that [...] I do think it's unhelpful. (E-LA6)

Eastshire officers understand the academies policy as the implementation of a *national* policy. National policymakers are framed as pursuing their policy strategy “very purposefully and very deliberately”, resulting in the undermining of Eastshire officers’ agency. Officers emphasise that the policy is being driven from a national level and that their resultant strategic practice needed to be the adoption of a ‘neutral’ stance towards academies, as this was considered to be the “path of least resistance”. There is thus a lack of ownership over the academies policy in the accounts of Eastshire officers as well as a sense that resisting the national scale is a risky or unreasonable strategy to pursue.

Encounters with National Actors

The final key dimension to how the national scale was made sense of by Eastshire officers relates to how they described instances where they questioned certain aspects of the academies policy and interfaced with the DfE over these issues. Two examples of this kind of encounter were described in the following way:

We've often had people here, erm, the Secretary of State, ministerial visits, because we were – particularly last year – the kind of head of the current in terms of the number of secondaries [converting to academy status], we would meet some of the problems *head on*. They just hadn't, the policy just hadn't been thought through in detail, the policy on the hoof, and therefore we were like, 'well do you realise that if you take that bit away this funding doesn't follow it and those kids are left with-?' [...] we've welcomed them and invited them when we've come across an issue and said, 'just come and look at this, let's talk to you about it.' (E-LA3)

you never get a, 'yes, you're right, we've got it wrong' response [from the DfE], you know, that just never ever happens. So the most you could hope for is that you put a mark – so the issue I talked about previously about [the local authority recently being told they need to fund the start-up costs of] opening new schools [academies], we've been in correspondence with the DfE officials before Christmas, we've had, on Friday, the, 'are you *sure* about this?' question, conversation: we're told, "yes," they are (E-LA5)

Encounters with national policymakers are described by Eastshire officers as a process of discussing problems and issues in a careful, non-confrontational manner. When officers come across something problematic with the academies policy they describe this to national policymakers as a learning opportunity. These problems are not presented to the DfE as a direct request for change but instead officers are described as suggesting, "let's talk to you about it", "do you realise [...]?" and "are you *sure* about this?" to national policymakers. The comment from E-LA5 above also highlights that officers do not expect to be acknowledged or given credit by national actors by explaining that "you never get a, 'yes, you're right, we've got it wrong' response". Thus, Eastshire officers re-count their inquiries about and reports of problems relating to academies in such a way that reveals that they adopt scalar practices which approach encounters with the national in a careful and diplomatic manner.

Summary

The section above has explored how policy actors in Eastshire make sense of their policy implementation work by mobilising constructions of a 'national' scale. Their representational practices revealed how particular constructions of the national shape the

way these actors went about implementing the academies policy. All Eastshire actors described national policy and policymakers as being distant and disconnected from their own realities. Principals and chairs of governors emphasised how national actors lack contextual knowledge of their particular academy while officers used a similar argument but focussed on the lack of knowledge about Eastshire as a whole. Actors working in individual academies also emphasised the national being distant by arguing that the fact that their academy is ‘directly accountable’ to the national level means very little to them. Interlinked with these constructions of the national as disconnected from the realities of Eastshire actors are arguments about the national scale occupying a distant physical location. Thus, scalar practices operate in such a way that they create *boundaries* between Eastshire actors and the national scale. This boundary subsequently emphasises how Eastshire actors perceived that different types of knowledge and understandings of policy exist at the national scale and that these differed from their own views and experiences.

Academy principals and chairs of governors associated their understandings of a national scale with their sense of operating in a ‘national marketplace’. For example, the financial benefits of converting to an academy were perceived as a national *incentive* which makes conversion a market behaviour that comes with rewards. Indeed, academy actors felt these market incentives to be so strong that they argued they had no choice other than to convert. Another example of principals’ and chairs of governors’ perceptions of a national marketplace was their discussion of the national policy narrative labelling academies as successful schools. Interviewees felt this narrative created reputational risk for schools which did not convert to academies and therefore once again reflected their sense of operating in a marketplace. These perceptions of being part of a national marketplace reveal how scalar practices can also *dissolve* boundaries between scales. Here, the mobilisation of the ‘national marketplace’ serves to dissolve the boundary between individual schools and the national schooling arena, a practice which, in turn, represents individual schools as participating in a national competition.

Academy actors also expressed how they actively manoeuvred themselves to be in an advantageous position in the national marketplace when they considered the financial advantages and reputational risks of the academies policy. They also discussed how they thought that converting to academy status would place them in a favourable position in the

eyes of national policymakers. This construction of the national reveals how the scalar practices deployed by actors emphasise how scales are *interrelated*; Eastshire actors perceived having a relationship with the national scale which they need to carefully negotiate in order to put themselves in an advantageous position.

Officers working in Eastshire County Council discussed how their policy work involved reacting to decisions being made at the national scale. This was illustrated by how officers felt that their agency was constrained by the uncertainty and lack of detail in national guidelines around implementing academies. Officers also understood change to be driven by decisions made at the national scale which highlights how their scalar practices represented Eastshire being at the receiving end of ‘top-down’ governance. By characterising their strategy for academies as the path of ‘least resistance’, officers further revealed how their policy work was shaped by the idea of a powerful national scale. These issues were also highlighted when officers described the nature of their negotiations with national actors; they performed scalar practices which emphasised how the national scale could only be communicated with in a non-confrontational and diplomatic manner. Here, actors’ scalar practices construct a boundary between themselves and the national scale and, importantly, this boundary is used to emphasise a hierarchical relationship which involves officers reacting to national directives.

Discussion

This chapter has exposed how the ‘national’ is a scalar construct which actors use to represent and strategically shape policy. The discussion has revealed that actors associate a wide variety of meanings with the notion of the ‘national’ and meanings have varied both within Northwestern and Eastshire as well as across these cases. One of the main insights developed in this chapter is how actors make reference to the notion of a national scale throughout all aspects of their policy work. The empirical material has illustrated how policy actors’ very first reactions to the academies policy were interlinked with considerations about the ‘national scale’. Once it had been confirmed that local authority and school actors were going to be engaging with the academies policy these scalar practices continued. Actors made choices around the manner in which they were going to conduct their policy work in relation to their understandings of national actors and narratives. By closely

examining how the national is constructed four key scalar practices have been identified in policy actors' accounts of their work.

The first scalar practice deployed by actors was the *construction of scalar boundaries*. This practice involved Northwestern and Eastshire actors representing themselves as occupying a position which was distinct and separate from the national scale. Constructing boundaries was a scalar practice which served to emphasise how Northwestern and Eastshire actors considered the national to be dominated by different types of knowledge and policy priorities to their own. For example, Northwestern principals described being scrutinised by national actors and agencies in such a way that did not take their context into consideration. Both principals and officers in Northwestern also emphasised how there was a tension and disconnect between their own priorities and experiences related to academies and the policy vision outlined at the national scale. In Eastshire, constructing the national scale as distant was also related to actors' perceptions that national actors lacked contextual knowledge of Eastshire and individual schools within it. Eastshire officers also mobilised the scalar practice of creating a boundary between themselves and the national scale in the way they conducted negotiations with national actors; by preferring the 'path of least resistance' and avoiding confrontation these officers emphasised a boundary which reflected their policy work being shaped by a clearly hierarchical scalar relationship.

Constructing the national scale through the scalar practice of creating boundaries was inextricably linked with *perceptions of material conditions* and physical distance. The national was characterised as being physically distant and geographically separate from Northwestern and Eastshire. This typically coincided with locating the national scale in London but was also generically referred to as being 'far away' from local authority and school actors. Scalar practices which constructed the national scale as being physically separate also linked this characterisation to the argument that the national is governed by a different type of knowledge. More specifically, national actors and policies were interpreted as lacking knowledge of local authority and individual school contexts; this was related directly to the physical distance between the national scale and the local authority areas. In light of this, the discussion has also revealed how scalar practices intersect with interpretations of geographical space when actors make sense of their policy work.

The second scalar practice which was mobilised by actors was to *dissolve scalar boundaries*. This practice was demonstrated most strikingly in Eastshire when principals and governors described how their individual academies were competing in a ‘national marketplace’. These actors understood the competitive schooling market to be an inescapable reality and did not perceive a boundary to exist between individual schools and the national scale. Dissolving scalar boundaries in this case had the effect of Eastshire actors feeling as though they had little choice other than to engage with academies in the way that would give them the greatest advantage in the national marketplace.

A third scalar practice which emerged from policy actors’ constructions of the national scale was to emphasise the *interrelated nature of scale*. An example of this scalar practice being deployed in Northwestern was when local authority officers described how Northwestern was a politically significant city to the national actors when the modified model of academies was being negotiated. At the same time Northwestern officers also regarded national policy as something which could be used to progress their own interests. In Eastshire the interrelated nature of scale was a practice which was mobilised when principals and governors described how they considered academy conversion to be an option which would satisfy national policymakers and put them in an advantageous position for future policy developments. Thus, the empirical material demonstrates how scalar practices are used by actors to both interpret the policy choices they are faced with and also shape the policy strategy which actors eventually adopt.

Finally, the fourth scalar practice which was demonstrated by actors was to strategically *shift* between different scalar constructs. This practice was demonstrated most clearly in the way officers framed the Northwestern Academies Model. Officers revealed how they approached the national academies policy by shifting the scalar focus away from the national vision for academies to instead consider how the policy could serve the interests of Northwestern City Council. Thus, the Northwestern variant of the academies policy was interpreted and strategically presented by officers actively shifting scalar emphasis away from academies as a national policy.

The scalar practices which have emerged from the empirical material have the potential to be both enabling and restrictive devices for the actors who deploy them. To take the

example of constructing scalar boundaries, Northwestern local authority officers used this scalar practice to assist them in justifying their choice to pursue their interests through developing a modified model of academies. A different implication of this scalar practice was demonstrated by Eastshire officers when the boundary between themselves and the national was emphasised as representing a *hierarchy* whereby they had limited agency to shape national policy.

This chapter has thus explored how scalar practices construct multiple and malleable meanings of ‘national’ policy, actors and dynamics. The next chapter explores how the empirical findings also demonstrated actors making sense of their policy work by deploying scalar practices which focussed on two other scalar constructs: the local authority and individual academy scales.

CHAPTER 6

Constructing the Local Authority and Individual Academy Scales

Having discussed how policy actors use constructions of a ‘national’ scale to make sense of the policy implementation process, the discussion will now focus on how actors deployed scale in alternative ways. Policy actors made sense of the academies policy in relation to two other scalar constructs: the local authority and the individual academy. Actors in both case studies went to great lengths to carefully define and characterise the nature of these two scales and the relationship between them. Indeed, the two scales were often defined in terms of how they relate to each other. It is important to note that although analysis discusses the local authority and individual academy as two scalar constructs it is by no means argued that these two scales can be clearly defined or delineated. At times they appear to be distinctly divided and at other times actors construct them as being fused together; they are deployed in contrasting and sometimes contradictory ways, occasionally by the same actor; they are a constant source of struggles over meaning rather than ever being in a fixed state – it is precisely these kinds of scalar dynamics and their underlying practices which the discussion seeks to unpack and interpret.

Constructing the Local Authority and Individual Academy Scales in Northwestern

This section outlines how Northwestern actors mobilised the two scalar constructs of the local authority and individual school. The discussion focuses on the scalar practices embedded in actors’ accounts of the following issues: justifying the Northwestern Academies Model, outlining a role for the local authority, interpretations of the City Council as an academy co-sponsor, considerations relating to academy sponsorship, and the issue of individualism and the market.

Justifying the Northwestern Academies Model

As discussed in Chapter 4, the academies policy was implemented in Northwestern by officers developing what they called the 'Northwestern Academies Model' which modified certain aspects of the policy. This modified model was created in order for academies to reflect City Council members' political opposition to the national academies policy narrative; they particularly objected to how the latter emphasised the side-lining of local authorities and the individualisation of schools. The model was also created in order to fit in with the City Council's wider aspirations for education in the city. The discussion will highlight how the Northwestern Academies Model involved scalar practices which strategically emphasised the city area served by the local authority rather than linking the academies policy to other spatial boundaries.

A key way in which Northwestern officers explained the reasoning behind the development of the Northwestern Academies Model was to argue that it involved collaborations across the whole city area as opposed to the benefits of academies being isolated around individual schools. The following quotations are from officers who were involved in the early stages of creating the model and their reasoning illustrates how they deployed distinct scalar arguments when discussing the academies policy:

I was trying to hit loads of agendas at the same time in the context of, if we could embrace the academy thing rather than resist it we could then generate money for new buildings alongside this *Building Schools for the Future* agenda, renew the opportunities for children in the city and the whole scale thing rather than landing in one place and making a new favourite school that was new, because it was called an academy and everyone would want to go to that, but you still leave everybody. So it was about cohesion really. (NW-LA5)

It was a case of trying to show people if we all worked on the same composite that we would get something better than if we only worked on our bit [...] I mean my thing was to get everybody dancing round the same maypole really. (NW-LA5)

if it runs away with Northwestern, you know, if it's like a whole load of different bitty schools and areas, erm, suddenly have, you know, erm, highly competitive, with very unfair financial arrangements, you know, erm... Then it just starts to break up, doesn't it? (NW-LA6)

Embedded within explanations of the Northwestern Academies Model is a clear strategy to construct the policy in relation to a particular scale. Importantly, the scale relevant to the academies policy is defined as correlating with the local authority area. Officers discuss the

model as providing “opportunities for children in the city” and for “the whole scale” and contrast this to a situation of “a whole load of different bitty schools and areas” and an academy “landing in one place”. Northwestern officers illustrate how, through the development of an alternative academies model, they are promoting one scalar construction over another – the Northwestern Academies Model can thus be interpreted as a *scalar project*. What is particularly interesting is how the Northwestern model was also developed in light of the opportunities relating to a different policy which existed at the time – *Building Schools for the Future* (BSF). The officer in the first quotation above refers to this by describing how officers were trying to take advantage of the BSF funds for new school buildings which would become available to Northwestern schools if the local authority engaged with the academies policy. This further emphasises how the academies policy was underpinned by scalar practices which considered the policy primarily in relation to prospective improvements for the whole Northwestern area as opposed to understanding the policy as something relating to individual schools. Implementing the policy by considering the entire city area and its child population is argued to be creating a sense of local cohesion and collaboration, or as one officer puts it, getting “everybody dancing round the same maypole”. The alternative to local authority-wide collaboration is framed as involving academies operating on an individual basis according to market-based principles of competition which, it is argued, would lead to the ‘breaking up’ and fragmentation of Northwestern.

Situating the policy firmly in relation to the local authority scale is also emphasised by the way in which officers described their role in the implementation of the Northwestern Academies Model. The following account encompasses officers’ understandings of the role played by the local authority in this process:

I just thought that the authority would gradually become the, erm, the glue that tried to pull everything together. Local authorities never, you know, people at the time thought local authorities were losing power – local authorities lost the power many years before that over schools. So all you could ever do was to try and get people committed to a citywide belief. Working together for the good of all children and so on. So when the academies thing would come along I thought we could be the glue that tried to get everybody together. (NW-LA5)

The quotation above highlights officers’ commitment to a very distinct scalar strategy. By understanding the local authority as being the ‘glue’ which encourages collaboration across

the city area, officers consciously construct the local authority area as being the most important scale. Officers do not only construct the Northwestern-wide scale to be consisting of collaborations across the city but they also emphasise a less tangible notion of commitment to a “citywide belief” as a key feature. The local authority area is therefore bound up with normative notions that define it as the best scale through which “the good of all children” in the city can be cultivated. Once again, the local authority is regarded as the only institution which can promote cohesion across Northwestern.

When describing the development stages of the Northwestern Academies Model, officers emphasised receiving a hostile reaction from City Council members. The following accounts refer to this:

I mean I *do* remember the *initial* reaction of [City Council] members to academies was to go outside and have a little protest and talk to the press and say, "we're never having them". Because it didn't like the sound of them. And that was worries about, erm, erm... I think that the schools would be elitist, and would cream off, you know, the brightest and the best (NW-LA6)

the other big tenet of it was [City Council] members wanted the schools to be open to the community. So they wanted it to be force for regeneration in the local area. (NW-LA6)

City Council members were concerned that the academies policy would result in individual schools behaving in an elitist manner. Officers have shown that they have responded to this concern by the way in which they represent all schools across the city as being incorporated within the wider local authority scale. There is also a concern about how a lack of collaboration would threaten the scalar project of the Northwestern Academies Model. Constructing policy in relation to the local authority scale is further emphasised by how City Council members link the meaning of an individual school to its *community*; the idea of a local scale is constructed by constantly linking individual behaviour to the wider socio-spatial boundaries of the entire local authority area.

A key issue alluded to by a number of interviewees but most clearly articulated in the quotation below related to the interconnection between the scalar project of the Northwestern Academies Model and interpretations of the material conditions of the local authority area.

I think one of the strengths of Northwestern is it's relatively small *geographically* so you can make a multi academy solution *work*. Erm... and also there is a spirit that, "we're *Northwestern*" that you can build on. (NW-LA5)

The above quotation articulates an understanding of the policy work involved in promoting the Northwestern Academies Model being supported by perceptions of a 'relatively small' geographical area which makes a 'sense of Northwestern' easier to achieve. Thus, the scalar practices underpinning the Northwestern Model need to be considered in relation to perceptions of the geographical environment.

The Local Authority's Role in the Context of Academies

It is clear that officers have reproduced scalar practices which promote the scalar project that underpinned the Northwestern Academies Model. When referring to the role of the local authority after the opening of Northwestern academies, officers continue to present their role in such a way that carves out particular scaled ways of approaching policy implementation. The quotations below are examples of how officers describe the continued role of the local authority after the launch of the new academies:

So we're, you know, working really hard to convince the other Heads that this [the academies policy] won't gobble up their school because they've got somebody next to them who's an academy. And, you know [the worry], that, that school [academy] will get all the youngsters, the good 'uns in and, you know, and I don't know what the Head Teachers think about. We managed to get working, erm, [and] convince them as well. (NW-LA6)

I think, I think that it's, erm [pause] at the heart of it, and I suspect that it's been quite hard to deliver, but at the heart of it it was that those schools [academies] had to see themselves with other schools as a sponsor for all the youngsters in that community. So it couldn't be, you know, "I'm going to...erm, get *my* youngsters in *my* school, *my* school, and make sure *they're* successful and blow it if, if the ones down the road..." So it, it was all about collaboration and cooperation. So it was about, at its heart, it was about feeling that you've got some responsibility for all the children in that area and therefore you worked in partnership. (NW-LA6)

The local authority's got a clear set of statutory functions and those remain and so you take any one of those – I mean one of those is to ensure a sufficient number of school places, every child having a school place and in the right place. And you can only exercise that duty if you, you're working in a partnership way with all the schools and providers in the city including academies. So, and I think if you say what is the, the emerging policy in this city, the leader of our Council in talking to Head Teachers is really not using the word 'academies', he's using the word 'schools' to be an inclusive thing, and embracing all schools [...] so that your

approach and your relationships go *beyond* whether we're talking about academy [or] not academy, yeah? (NW-LA2)

The first two quotations above emphasise the importance of the local authority in constructing a non-divisive notion of a common local authority scale amongst schools and academies in Northwestern. An officer in the first quotation describes working hard to convince school Heads that the academies did not represent a threat. Similarly, officers argued that the local authority has been there to remind academies that they are part of a larger collaborative project which relates to all students in the city, something that is in opposition to exclusively focussing on the success of their particular institution. Thus, this further highlights how local authority officers are strategically adopting scalar practices which emphasise the whole city and all its schools as a way of encouraging positive relations between academies and non-academies. This particular scalar practice is also deployed by officers when they describe the overarching role of the local authority. The third quotation above discusses how in order for the local authority to carry out its statutory functions it works in partnership “with all the schools and providers in the city” in such a way that does not make academies distinct. Indeed, officers discussed how there has been a deliberate attempt by the Council leader to refer to ‘schools’ and not ‘academies’ in order to emphasise how all schools should be working according to the same vision regardless of their official school status. This, in turn, further underlines how implementation has involved privileging the idea of the local authority scale above that of an individual school or academy.

When discussing the implementation of academies in Northwestern, officers explained how it coincided with a restructuring of the local authority’s service provision role. The latter involved ending the top-slicing of school funding which contributed to local authority funds for the provision of education services. Instead, the Dedicated School Grant remained with schools, therefore giving them a choice over education service providers. When officers discussed this aspect of the local authority’s role there was an interesting shift in their arguments regarding what scale schools ought to consider when choosing their education services. The following descriptions serve to illustrate this:

our strategy was schools, erm, are best placed to decide what services they want (NW-LA2)

DSG – dedicated school grant funding – it's just gone into schools. And, and those decisions are being made more locally. And the [local] authority has a much more finite but much more therefore powerful, you know, strategic role in terms of challenging the performance of schools rather than, you know, carrying them and worrying about them and fussing about them and getting in their way as a result. (NW-LA3)

it was a strategic decision that the local authority should focus on its championship role – champion of outcomes, advocacy for children [...] the local authority, as a *generic* advocate of place. Rather than a kind of educational, technical, professional advocate of place. [...] we focus our efforts very clearly on our right to look at a school straight in the eye and say, "we believe that you could do better on behalf of our electorate, the people of Northwestern have elected us to look you in the eye and say, to have that conversation with you because they're *our* children that you're educating. So, how well are you doing? What could you do differently? How could you contribute to the wider aims of the City Council?" (NW-LA3)

Officers justify the re-structuring of the local authority's service provision role by arguing that allowing schools to decide which service they would like to buy back from the local authority means that "decisions are being made more locally". There is a shift in the scalar practices being adopted here where the spatial boundaries of individual schools are highlighted as being the most important socio-spatial unit. Nevertheless, even within these discussions over school choice and service provision, the notion of a Northwestern vision continues to remain a strong overarching construct that is situated further up the scalar hierarchy. Officers consistently bring the discussion back to the notion of the local authority and City Council as embodying a scale in which all individual schools are encompassed. For example, in the third quotation above, the officer describes the local authority being a "*generic* advocate of place" and explains this as a role which reminds schools that they have a responsibility towards "the electorate, the people of" Northwestern and that they need to "contribute to the wider aims of the City Council". Thus, there are two scalar constructions at play here – one relating to school choice and freedom to choose education services and the other relating to belonging to the City Council's wider vision for the future. The way in which the City Council is emphasised as being democratically elected is important as it ensures that the scale occupied by the local authority loses none of its gravity despite the individual school scale being given greater agency.

Interpreting the City Council's Co-sponsor Role

The discussion has thus far highlighted how the academies policy was represented and strategically shaped by officers in such a way that primarily emphasised the scalar construct

of the whole local authority area. Academy sponsors have also constructed their own interpretations of the Northwestern Academies Model. Sponsors' interpretations were conveyed during discussions about the City Council's co-sponsorship role and the following accounts are typical of the ways sponsors reflected on this:

So I think we were trying to take a really joined-up view of this, about the school – the academy – can be a pivotal part not only in the education of a small group of children and in the community but also helping to inform policy of the local authority. And that's how we've tried to deal with that [Northwestern City Council] co-sponsor. (NW-S1)

Well where it's worked really really well is...knowing what's going on in the city, knowing what the region's priorities are, knowing what's the community – for example she's [the City Council representative] hooked us up with the region team who talked us through all the social, the health implications, so what are the big health problems. And when we'd started it, the drugs issue in that area [in which the academy is located] had been very different. I, we hadn't realised that there'd been a shift. Actually knowing that is incredibly helpful. [...] Also knowing about some of the things about planning, so where's the local library going to go? What about transport? And it's really making sure that the academy isn't just happily pottering along in its own way but it *is* connected [...] (NW-S2)

[the City Council co-sponsor] is a huge strength and, erm, erm, some of the examples of where the City [Council] add value is that the City [Council] link us with all the, erm, social support networks, erm, the programmes within the city in terms of, as we would call it, social services and, erm, for example, the City [Council] have many initiatives associated with complex family units, etc, so the City [Council] link us with those sort of initiatives [...] fundamentally one of the biggest, erm, supports and added values they provide is linking across the city with other support mechanisms and benefiting the xxxx academy through that, and enriching the life of the students because of that. They open doors. (NW-S3)

What emerges from these accounts is that sponsors understand there to be two scales operating in the policy implementation process and, importantly, sponsors consider the City Council partnership to be linking up these different parts of the scalar hierarchy. Individual academies are understood as being at the bottom of the scalar hierarchy – the first quotation underlines this by relating an academy to “a small group of children in the community”. The scale which sponsors imagine to be the next level ‘up’ from individual academies is that of the city. The latter is understood to encompass the local authority's wider policy visions and policy initiatives outside the immediate domain of education. All sponsors argue that it is imperative that the two scales are joined up. Without linking the academy scale to the local authority scale, sponsors are concerned that their academy will “just [be] happily pottering along in its own way” and will not contribute to addressing the

wider challenges being faced by the city as a whole. The City Council co-sponsor is emphasised as constantly forging links between the two scales, something which echoes the scalar arguments of Northwestern officers when they described the role they aspired to play in the Northwestern Academies Model.

Academy principals were also asked about what the City Council offered through its co-sponsorship role. This question allowed for these actors' scalar representations to also come sharply into focus. Two principals understood the co-sponsorship role through an epistemology which emphasised their individual academy being the primary scale through which they made sense of the City Council's role. For example:

we went for a car ride in the summer around all the local areas where my students come from to have a look at the deprived areas, as we were driving she [the City Council co-sponsor representative] was talking to me about the major issues in each area, they've given me information on, erm, postal codes, percentage of where my students that come from deprived areas, is *that* sort of information that is really really useful. (NW-P1)

So she's [the City Council co-sponsor representative] been a huge asset for us because whenever we've encountered barriers, particularly around how can we do some joint working with social services, she's been able to smooth things and point people in the right direction and take up problems on our behalf really with officers in the local authority. (NW-P4)

It is clear from the above quotations that the principals focus on what the City Council co-sponsor can bring to their individual academy. The first quotation equates "local areas" to the academy catchment area, underlining how scalar practices are deployed by the principal in a way which makes the individual academy assume a central focus. Similarly, the principal in the second quotation frames the contribution of the City Council co-sponsor as tackling problems faced by the individual academy. Although the principal refers to how the co-sponsor helps the academy work with social services, this connection is not related to the local authority scale; rather, solving the problem specific to the academy remains the primary focus. The local authority and individual academy scales are constructed as being disconnected through these principals' scalar practices.

Understandings of the City Council's co-sponsorship role were not consistent across principals however, and the two other interviewees described this role by adopting different scalar practices:

I think they [the City Council] have good *local* knowledge. They know about other schools, they know about how Northwestern does things [...] they know about what else is going on in the community [...] Northwestern City Council have a vision for the future of Northwestern and education is *part* of that vision. And it's part of the jigsaw, it's not the only part of the jigsaw. [...] The school is the first part of that jigsaw. You know, when you're regenerating the community what do you put in place? You put in place a good school to help people look at it as a good place to live. Erm, but, you know, what they bring to the table? Local knowledge, vision for the future, erm, a very very proactive interest in the future of Northwestern. Whereas outsiders would have a business sense but they wouldn't have that local *drive*. (NW-P3)

So we have, we have a very good understanding and good connectivity to the business model of Northwestern, so the regeneration, Northwestern's got quite an ambitious and innovative regeneration vision. So we connect to *that* [...] (NW-P2)

These two principals differentiate between the scale of their individual academy and that of the wider city but, crucially, emphasise that these two scales are *connected*. They describe how the City Council co-sponsor helps to strengthen the “connectivity to the business model” of the city and makes them aware of the overall “jigsaw” of which their academy is one part. This is particularly evident in the first quotation above where the principal talks about the co-sponsor having “*local* knowledge”. The latter is related to knowledge of other schools in Northwestern, to an awareness of the wider activities happening in the immediate community the academy is situated in, as well as to the local authority area as a whole. Scalar practices are being deployed here to emphasise the idea that individual schools are nested within the wider local authority area. Both principals emphasise the importance of being linked to the overarching “vision” for the future of the city, which once again underlines scalar practices focusing on the local authority area rather than emphasising the physical boundaries and interests of individual academies.

Considerations Relating to Academy Sponsorship

A key tenet of the Northwestern Academies Model involved officers carefully selecting business sponsors. Officers initially approached a number of organisations they considered suitable for the role, explained the Northwestern Academies Model to them, and subsequently encouraged the businesses to declare their interest in the project. Interested organisations were then selected via a formal interview process. The way in which officers described how and why they selected sponsors reveals important insights into the scalar practices underpinning these decisions. The following accounts are typical:

I was hoping that the sponsors, like xxxx [sponsor name], would say, "through this one academy what can we do for all the children in Northwestern?" [...] So the sponsor would work to make the individual school better but also contribute across the city. (NW-LA5)

We shared our vision for the world of work and employment and we asked for those employers who both bought into this and want to contribute to it to declare their interest and to declare their willingness and we started to sift. And we sifted through and there was some, there was some criteria, they were based on, we didn't want to see anyone who felt this to be something that was about promotion of brand or, shall we say, a marketing opportunity. It had to be where they could see the mutual benefit of them contributing to, to the communities where their employees would be drawn from, the future wellbeing of the city being inextricably linked with *their* well-being. Employers who were committed to the city, committed therefore to the success of the city's communities and therefore more than likely to be in there for the long term. So we didn't simply want someone flash, we wanted someone who had roots in the city [...] (NW-LA4)

[the chosen sponsors] were committed to *Northwestern*. [...] these were the people who had a long history of working in Northwestern [...] So they were people who were committed. What we used to say to [City Council] members is, "they're committed to your *values*" you know. "They're in the city for the long haul" etc. So we felt they also brought a passion about Northwestern, you know, the belief that you can succeed in Northwestern and just that that would transmit itself to the governing body. (NW-LA6)

The quotations highlight how the key criterion for selecting academy sponsors was that they needed to demonstrate dedication to the local authority-wide vision. The city is thus constructed as the most important scale relating to the academies policy, with sponsors needing to be "committed to the city", "to the success of the city's communities" and "all the children" in Northwestern. Individual academies are also discussed as a separate scale relevant to the discussion, however officers adopt scalar practices to constantly link these arguments back to a city-wide focus. For example, in the first quotation above the officer wants sponsors to consider how they can bring benefits to all children in Northwestern through their engagement with a particular academy. Similarly, these two scales are linked in the third quotation by an officer who argues that a sponsor's determination to succeed in Northwestern will, in turn, result in a positive contribution being transmitted to an individual academy's governing body. In both these examples, emphasis is placed on the city as being the scale which is the most influential and important for policy success compared to the scale of individual academies. Officers also promote the idea that the local authority scale is a platform which can mutually support the wellbeing of sponsors and City Council members' values.

When sponsors were asked about why they chose to become involved in the Northwestern Academies Model their responses placed importance on particular scalar constructions over others. The following quotations are examples of how sponsors made sense of their decision to become involved in the policy initiative:

[initially] academies...jarred with [our values] [...] Because it felt like they were being taken out of local authority control. And we... said “no” in the first instance. [...] Getting Northwestern City Council involved, I think pretty much swayed it for us. That they would stay involved and that it would be a collaboration across the city. We didn’t want – we still don’t want – academies that shut doors to the outside world. (NW-S1)

they [Northwestern officers] came along and said to us, “we’d like you to be a sponsor”. We said, “no thanks [smiles] – it’s not where we want to go, it’s not in our interest”. At that time academy sponsors, there was a particular type: you put your £2 million in and you get a new name on the building and all those sorts of things – that wasn’t us. Okay. So they came back to see us a couple of times, and explained to us that it wasn’t about the money, it was *commitment*. [...] It was using major employers and bringing our expertise in to helping *them* to raise the standards of education in Northwestern. And it just felt a *natural progression*. (NW-S4)

it fitted nicely within something that our policy and our intent is an organisation was and it also brought some benefit locally because it meant, erm, the way the city had gone about – why I said before that it was an enlightened approach that the City [Council] had taken was because it had gone through some serious research to think about in terms of the future of this *city*, in terms of its economic welfare and development, it needed *skills*. (NW-S5)

One of the most striking features of these accounts is the importance sponsors place on the role of the City Council in convincing them that the Northwestern Academies Model was a worthy project to become involved in. Indeed, the first two quotations outline how the sponsors initially rejected the idea of academies and it was the prospect of collaborating with Northwestern City Council that eventually led them to change their minds. One sponsor describes how their understanding that academies took schools “out of local authority control” was a negative impression that “jarred” with their organisational values. This demonstrates how sponsors place great importance on the local authority being involved in the implementation of academies. Sponsors perceived the Northwestern Academies Model as bringing ‘local benefits’ and understood these as being achieved through the fundamental linking of academies and the local authority. Academies and the local authority are constructed as being two different scales, and there is an understanding

that if the link between them is severed, academies will “shut their doors to the outside world” and no longer be linked to city-wide ambitions. The scalar strategy set out in the Northwestern Academies Model appears once again – this time it is reflected in the considerations made by sponsors regarding their involvement in the academies policy.

Individualism and the Market in Tension with the Northwestern Academies Model

The distinctive practices which underpinned the Northwestern Academies Model were not consistently reproduced by actors. In the case of Northwestern principals, there were two instances where it was made clear that they wanted to maintain a disconnect between the scale of their individual academy and the scale associated with wider local authority interests. The following comments reflect this attitude:

sometimes in the past – with all due respect for local authority – they could *slow things down* and they could muddy the waters and they could get in the way and they could be a bit wishy-washy. Here now, at least you are master or mistress of your own destiny. (NW-P3)

But with the local authority *itself* what's happened is there's been a strategic level, high level in the city, they've embraced the academies, they've understood what the Northwestern Model is, and they've understood what our role is in terms of being independent. That's never really filtered down to middle managers or officer level in the local authority. [...] they insisted on thinking that we were a local authority school. So the first time we were open [...] four people came in and said that they were doing an attendance audit. And I said, "well, actually, no, you're *not*". [laughs slightly] [the officers replied:] "Erm, well we've been to every other school" and I said, "well that might *be* but we're an *academy*, you have *no rights* to come in here, I haven't requested it" [...] We had issues around [local authority] people who think that they can just come in and demand things of us and they don't understand the protocols. And I have had to be very firm about some of these things because it's easy to just slip into it and think, "oh well, it doesn't really *matter*". But it actually *does* matter, in terms of affirming our status as an independent school within the system. And that the local authority's role is a statutory role only in terms of school places really. And we've had similar issues about admissions and particularly mid-year admissions, you know, children turning up on the doorstep with a letter from the local authority saying, “you've got a place”. “Well we know nothing about it.” And I said, "no, *we're* our own admissions authority therefore *we* will administer our admissions." (NW-P4)

The above comments demonstrate how these principals understand their academies to be separate from the local authority in these instances. Even though they consider their academy to be connected to the wider ‘city vision’ principals sometimes also demonstrate a sense of ownership over the future of their institution in such a way which excludes the local authority. The second quotation is particularly interesting – the principal provides a

detailed explanation of how local authority officers have ‘wrongly’ interpreted what it means to be “an independent school [academy] within the system”. Officers are described as arriving at the academy to carry out an attendance audit and attempting to manage the academy’s admissions, something which the principal objects to. Interestingly, the principal does not interpret this as a clash with the Northwestern Academies Model at “the strategic level” but rather blames the “officer level” for not understanding the model. It would appear therefore that this is a moment where officers and the principal construct the scalar boundaries between the local authority and individual academies in different ways. The two scales appear to be joined up to a greater degree according to officers, whereas the principal constructs looser scalar connections between the academy and local authority. While these kinds of struggles are largely infrequent, such moments of tension are important windows that give an insight into the political nature of creating and negotiating scalar projects.

It is of similar importance to note that sponsors did not always frame the role of Northwestern officers in a positive light. Interviewees referred to tensions emerging between sponsors and local authority officers which revealed a disagreement over how academies should be implemented. These occasional tensions related to a range of situations, including the following:

At the start [of implementing the Northwestern Academies Model] the Council *did* take the lead. And I think that annoyed us. Because it was always the Council having the conversations with [government] – and we were like, “hang on, who’s deciding what here?” And I think that was a hard shift for the Council to say, to realise that actually, we, they’d done a really good job and found some *really* proactive sponsors who *weren’t* just going to sit back. Who *weren’t* going to do what the Council said, who had an opinion about it, and I think that was possibly one of the early tensions around...that, that we aren’t silent sponsors, that we have a say, we have a drive. (NW-S2)

one of the things we've been doing recently together is trying to work with the City Council to improve the admissions process which I'm very unhappy about, I'm not sure we've totally resolved [it] yet, because I believe that they're frustrating our ability to be our own admissions authority. Erm, because they do things in the way they've always done it and that doesn't accommodate academies. And they're playing lip service to a point but, it's not appropriate. (NW-S5)

Erm, it wasn't always an easy journey, it was quite bumpy at times, erm, because obviously the way corporations behave and the way councils behave is culturally quite different (NW-S5)

The accounts above reveal how the tensions between sponsors and local authority officers or City Council members can be related to different understandings of where agency lies in the scalar hierarchy. The first quotation above refers to how the sponsor felt frustrated about being excluded by the City Council from government discussions over Northwestern academies. This reflects a disagreement over the roles and authority of different actors in the scalar hierarchy. It appears that, on the one hand, the City Council considers sponsors to be further down the scalar hierarchy and therefore not relevant to negotiations about local authority-wide strategies. On the other hand, sponsors consider themselves to be operating on a scale which means that they ought to be included in discussions about the Northwestern Academies Model. The sponsor's account in the second quotation above expresses a frustration that the local authority has continued to attempt to coordinate academy admissions. This sponsor emphasises the scale of the individual academy to argue that the latter is separate and should operate independently from the local authority scale. Interestingly, when sponsors emphasise the separation of different scales within Northwestern, they also emphasise how these scales are dictated by different kinds of knowledge and ways of working. The third quotation above is an example of this, where these scalar tensions are infused with an argument about a public-private sector divide; this serves to highlight scales as distinct rather than connected. While the Northwestern Academies Model has largely been demonstrated to be supported by actors having a common scalar outlook these examples of tensions illustrate how dominant scalar practices compete with and suppress alternative practices.

An additional issue which indicated that actors mobilised scalar practices which undermined the scalar project of the Northwestern Academies Model was competition between schools. Both sponsors and principals noted that individual academies and schools felt in competition with each other. The following quotations are some examples of how actors explained this:

Well...the, fascinatingly, the principals certainly feel in competition. [pause] And they've always felt slightly more in competition than the sponsors. And I've never – I *do* understand why, and we have tried to, broken that down, but...I think the principals do feel...slightly more, traditionally 'my school's here, your school's there, we're in competition'. (NW-S1)

we didn't expect to be a standalone academy, just doing our own thing. The vision was that we would work closely with other high schools and that we would be a

working cluster [...] The disappointment was that we didn't get the reception from the others, we were seen as a threat. (NW-S4)

Of course the consequence of that is: brand-new school, brand-new Academy, yes we *did*, shall we say, affect a *slight* drop in numbers in one or two of our local high schools. [...] So we've tried to be collaborative. Erm, but yeah, it, it [sighs] being collaborative in a competitive world is a difficult balance. (NW-P3)

And of course the truth is if you looked at the demographics of the area, where were the children going to come from? [...] So you could see that they [other schools] were thinking, "they're going to *take*, they're going to *poach* our youngsters, they're going to *take* our youngsters". And there *was* some of that, inevitably because of parental preference. But, but they're not [pause] where, where, it's taken a while for relationships [pause] to develop. And they've developed again on a purely individual basis. So there are certain headteachers who, that I would trust to work with, erm, there are others I wouldn't. (NW-P4)

All of these comments by sponsors and principals emphasise how there is a lack of cohesion or collaboration amongst academies and schools within Northwestern. Interviewees understand academies and schools to be operating on the same scale, which is seen as the main reason for tensions existing between them. The third and fourth quotations describe how some academies have been seen as a threat by non-academies due to competition over pupils; these institutions are emphasised as belonging to the same scalar boundaries and therefore necessarily 'competing' for students. It is clear that actors are aware of an alternative possibility where academies and schools can be "collaborative" or create "a working cluster" and, indeed, the Northwestern Academies Model aimed for school relations to be collaborative rather than fragmented. However, all the actors in the comments above argue that the situation whereby schools and academies are competing has meant that this vision for scalar collaboration has been difficult to achieve.

Summary

The discussion has highlighted how policy actors in Northwestern made sense of the implementation of academies in relation to two scales: the local authority and the individual school. These two scales were constructed and harnessed by actors to convey the strategies they adopted and the understandings they developed in relation to the academies policy. What is striking about the dominant scalar practices of Northwestern actors is that they closely mirrored the strategy of the Northwestern Academies Model. It has been argued that the latter can be considered a *scalar project* in light of its overarching aims. Namely, the Model has been developed on the premise that the local authority scale is fundamental to

the implementation of academies and the individual academy scale is nested within (rather than being disconnected from) a wider local authority vision.

Officers articulated this scalar strategy when promoting the idea that all schools and academies should be committed to the Northwestern area and collaborate to achieve the local authority vision rather than schools pursuing any individual strategies. A similar argument was also made by officers when they described how the role of the local authority is to construct a common vision for the city of Northwestern which all schools – regardless of whether they are academies – should work towards. A key scalar practice which was mobilised to convey this was to *dissolve boundaries* between the local authority and individual academy scales; this was essential to pursuing the Northwestern Academies Model.

Officers also discussed academies as being related to the restructuring of the local authority's role in educational services. While officers argued about the importance of individual schools making decisions over their education services expenditure, they also consistently re-emphasised how schools were part of a wider local authority vision. Thus, a strategic scalar practice deployed in these cases was to *shift* the focus away from the individual academy scale to place importance on the local authority scale.

The discussion has also underlined how academy sponsors considered the City Council's co-sponsorship role to connect an individual academy to wider local authority visions and initiatives. Key scalar practices deployed here were to both *dissolve perceived scalar boundaries* between the local authority and individual schools as well as to *strategically shift* the focus away from individual academies and represent them as part of the local authority 'jigsaw'. The City Council's co-sponsorship role was interpreted inconsistently amongst Northwestern principals during interviews. Some principals described this role by exclusively focussing on what the City Council could offer their individual academy without linking this to the wider local authority scale. Indeed, their scalar practices involved constructing scalar boundaries between their individual academy and the local authority. Other principals did reproduce the scalar arguments of the Northwestern Academies Model and linked the benefits they received from the City Council co-sponsor to their contribution to a local authority-wide vision.

Considerations relating to academy sponsorship also exposed how actors were adopting practices that reinforced the significance of the Northwestern local authority scale. Officers described how the primary criterion for selecting sponsors was for businesses to be dedicated to Northwestern and willing to contribute to the local authority-wide vision. Sponsors justified becoming involved in the academies policy by emphasising how they were committed to Northwestern. They deployed scalar practices which emphasised *scalar boundaries being dissolved* and did this by underlining how they were attracted to the idea of academies contributing to a wider local authority strategy.

Despite dominant scalar practices reflecting the strategy of the Northwestern Academies Model, the local authority scale was not always considered to be the primary concern of individual academies. For example, some principals emphasised how they wanted to maintain a disconnect between their own individual academy and the local authority. Similar scalar practices of *constructing scalar boundaries* were also mobilised by some sponsors when they described tensions existing between themselves and local authority officers. Finally, the issue of competition and tense relations between schools and academies in Northwestern highlighted how principals often regarded the protection of their individual school interests to be a primary priority. The latter involved emphasising a scalar boundary existing between the local authority and individual school scales which clashed with the goals of the Northwestern Academies Model. These particular scalar practices however were articulated to a limited degree, with actors' policy work being dominated by scalar considerations related to the local authority and the integration of individual schools within this. However, what these tensions have served to highlight is that if prevailing scalar practices are to remain dominant they need to compete with and suppress practices which frame policy in relation to alternative scalar arguments.

Constructing the Local Authority and Individual Academy Scales in Eastshire

The chapter will now turn to describe how the two scalar constructs of the local authority and individual academy were mobilised in Eastshire. The scalar practices embedded in actors' accounts of the following issues form the focus of the discussion: academy status being related to school choice, the creation of an education services market, the role of the

local authority in an academised schooling landscape, the strategy of school-to-school partnerships, and how the academies policy is related to institutional identity.

School Choice and Academy Status

The response of Eastshire County Council to the 2010 Academies Act was to state that it took a ‘neutral’ stance towards the academies policy. Eastshire officers explained this position by emphasising how the choice over whether or not to convert to academy status lay firmly with individual successful schools. The following quotations reflect this scalar argument:

some local authorities have actively encouraged all schools to become academies as soon as possible. But this authority’s position has always been that schools – well, good schools, successful schools – are in the best position to make their own choices. (E-LA1)

We’ve always, our, our, policy and school status was always, ‘schools are best placed to decide’. [...] I think some schools were expecting the local authority to fight academy status but I think equally there is a sort of level of pragmatism that we took in that we said: actually, well, schools want to do this, they’re going to do it and the local authority putting up barriers and resisting it means that, it’s going to make for more tricky and difficult relationships once a school has converted, so let’s not do that, let’s just play it with a very straight back and we’ll support schools no matter what they choose to do. (E-LA5)

we feel it’s a school’s *choice* about whether to become an academy or not, it’s for the school and the community to make [...] we said it’s entirely for the community to make a decision, and if the community makes the decision we’re not going to take it as a slight that they don’t like the local authority [laughs] because they’ve all said, “it’s nothing to do with that, it was funding, it was peer pressure, it was...” you know. (E-LA3)

These quotations emphasise that the local authority has had a long-term policy that supports the idea that (successful) “schools are best placed to decide.” Choice over whether to convert to academy status is therefore constructed as being an issue to be decided firmly within the spatial boundaries of individual schools. Thus, officers emphasise how individual schools are the most relevant consideration when it comes to making the decision about whether to convert to an academy. The third quotation above discusses how the policy is a decision “for the school and the community”. It is clear that ‘the community’ here is directly linked to the individual school as opposed to the wider local authority scale by the way in which this officer describes ‘community’ being separate from the local authority.

Indeed, officers create a scalar division between individual schools and the local authority and emphasise how the latter should not intervene in decisions being made in the former. In this way, officers represent themselves occupying a scalar domain which is separate from deliberations about academy status. By deploying these scalar practices, it is clear that officers consider themselves as having limited agency over individual school behaviour. This is emphasised in the second quotation above, where an officer describes the local authority being ‘pragmatic’ in accepting that Eastshire schools wanted to convert and were going to do so regardless of the local authority’s stance. In light of this, Eastshire officers emphasise a scalar division between individual schools and their immediate ‘communities’ on the one hand, and the local authority on the other hand. This scalar separation is presented as a positive situation that maximises school agency, but is simultaneously understood to be a pragmatic stance for the local authority to take in light of the determination of schools to convert to academy status.

Interviews with academy principals and chairs of governors also revealed representational practices which framed the academies policy in relation to individual schools. All principals and governors explained their decision to convert to academy status as a necessity to do what was best for their school. Many discussed how they experienced personal dilemmas or stakeholder resistance during the consultation process. These concerns and tensions related to the perception that academies could have a negative impact on the local authority area as a whole, however these anxieties were always side-lined due to the needs of an individual school consistently taking priority. The following quotations are examples of this scalar practice which actively constructs issues of the local authority-wide area as being outside one’s immediate scalar priorities:

as a policy, erm, I think I'm fairly ideologically opposed to it [...] you know, ultimately, you know, I *do* have principles and it's important that I *stay true* to my principles. But I guess also, you know, there are times where you do compromise, not your principles, but *compromise* because I, I'm employed first and foremost to make a difference to the lives of children. So I felt that, erm, in making one decision [not to convert to an academy] I was going to disadvantage students at xxxx [name of academy] then of course that's going to be, you know, that for me is a fundamental issue to deal with first and foremost. (E-P2)

it's fair to say there was, you know, a fairly significant debate among the governing body about whether academy status was a good thing or not. Not *really* from a purely *pragmatic* way, I don't think any of the governors, erm, argued that it actually wasn't good for *this* school [...] it was more a sort of deficit model, saying, "well if you get it others will suffer" or "it's taking away local democratic control" and *all* these sort of... More tangential areas. But erm... it wasn't really, there was quite an extensive debate but at the end of the day, erm, when we came to make the decision, the decision had to be: what is in the best interests of xxxx [name of academy]? [...] the arguments against were either, sort of, you know, altruistic, that it's hurting other people elsewhere in the county or if we don't do it, you know, et cetera others won't suffer and so on and so forth. So there was, in terms of the school *itself*, the pros were pretty overwhelming, there was no real reason not to do it. (E-P4)

But, again, as a governor it's hard to argue with nearly £1 million going into your school's infrastructure. *Now*, you know, at the larger policy level, is that a *good* thing? Erm, to direct it towards academies rather than other schools? I don't know. [pause] But that's my, my role in *this* is, as chair of governors [laughs slightly] there's just no argument. [...] it's rather like, erm, arguments about where, where politicians send their children, whether they send them to private school, I couldn't make my school a sort of sacrificial victim for some kind of, erm, erm, policy statement. (E-G2)

Although the above comments demonstrate how principals and governors made sense of concerns over academy status in contrasting ways, what they all share is a scalar perspective that their first priority is the individual school in which they work. This is perhaps most striking in cases where actors articulated being personally opposed to the academies policy on the basis of personal political ideologies and principles. The first quotation above is an example of this case, where the principal describes being forced to “compromise” personal principles due to the perceived disadvantages non-conversion would bring to the school. This principal therefore makes the decision to convert to academy status based on what is best for the individual school in question. In this way, individual school choice is framed as being related to considerations concerning the individual school unit, with other scalar constructs further up the scalar hierarchy – such as that of the local authority area – being side-lined. This is particularly highlighted in the second quotation above, where the principal describes the “altruistic” concerns of some governors over the effects of the academies policy on other schools in Eastshire. The principal also refers to questions about academies’ democratic accountability as “tangential areas” of consideration. Once again, this principal understands academies to involve two scales – the local authority area and an individual school. The principal argues that considering the former scale is ‘un-pragmatic’ and of peripheral interest compared to addressing the needs of the individual school. A similar stance is taken by a chair of governors in the third quotation where considerations about “the larger policy level” and “other schools” are avoided by shifting the scalar focus

to the governor's individual role which is to exclusively act in the interests of the school. The governor goes further to add that not choosing to convert to academy status would be making the "school a sort of sacrificial victim for some kind of [...] policy statement," which further demonstrates scalar practices that focus on the spatial boundaries of an individual school.

Creating an Education Services Market

When discussing the implementation of the academies policy, officers focused on how the high rate of academy conversion in Eastshire has affected the way in which education services are provided by the local authority. A decrease in funding linked to the high academy conversion rate in Eastshire has contributed to the local authority shifting towards a 'subscription package' of education services. This involves academies and schools having the choice to 'subscribe' to a range of education services provided by the local authority. In this new situation, the local authority competes within a market of education service providers, which includes private companies and even other local authorities. This shift towards a marketisation of educational services has had important implications for the way the local authority provides services. The following quotations are typical of how officers have described these changes:

We are beginning to sort of develop in a way, you know, it's quite a change where we've been providing services, sort of, *exclusively* to schools but now there is a market out there, there is competition from other local authorities, in terms of the *traded* part of the local authority. In Eastshire we have chosen to be open and traded with the schools, so we have quite an extensive range of services which we do offer. And... It's looking at those services and... Developing them in response to the academies and what they require, it's listening to them, what they need, and changing the ways we work and the services we offer really. (E-LA4)

What we've tried to do this year is set up a subscription service, so if academies subscribe to a kind of package of support, they get a whole range of services, at a discount. So cheaper than they would if they went for individual services. We've tried to wrap-up some of these services, like dealing with complaints, within that subscription package, because the difficulty is...is if they don't subscribe you get, you potentially get to the position of somebody answering the phone and saying "well, you've been on the phone to me for 10 minutes, that'll be 50 quid". And we...resisted the, being in that situation. But commercial realities are such that we...we will need to...raise schools' awareness that we need to charge...for, for many more of the services that they previously had for free. (E-LA1)

some local authorities would say, you know, "academies have to pay for everything" – *we've* gone down the line of, "yeah, you have, we've got some packages that you

can buy but actually we will do an annual ‘keeping-in-touch’ visit to every single school”, and...because we see that as our ‘duty of care’ for the children [smiles] because actually if we’re not having that touch stone – as *light* touch as it is – actually we can’t pick up if a school’s *beginning* to dip, and actually in terms of my duty of care about academic progress, and actually the Heads of the academies all welcome that and we’ve gone for it, and in fact we’re moving to a ‘keeping-in-touch’ meeting *termly*, because they’re, they said that they value it. (E-LA3)

It is clear from these quotations that, similar to what has been discussed previously, officers’ scalar practices construct the local authority and schools as occupying different scalar domains in Eastshire. The local authority is the service provider and individual schools are the service buyers or consumers. It is striking how the market has had an important effect on how these scalar relations are made sense of. In the first quotation above, the officer’s description makes it clear that individual schools are considered to have a great deal of agency over the shaping of service provision. For example, the local authority is described as listening to the needs of academies and responding accordingly to their demand. This is directly linked to the notion that “there is a market out there” and competition has been introduced from other scales such as other local authorities and private providers. Thus, Eastshire officers understand the market as causing the scalar boundaries of the local authority area to become more permeable, allowing other scalar influences to enter their domain.

In addition, what is striking about the shift towards the marketisation of services is that there is an inherent tension within the new, ‘provider-consumer’ dynamic between the local authority and schools on the one hand, and the endurance of the older type of connection which is based on trust and long-term relationships on the other hand. This comes through in both the second and third quotations above where officers describe both of these scalar dynamics existing simultaneously. The officer in the second quotation discusses the dilemma of being in a situation where an academy which is not paying for the subscription service seeks local authority advice. Being in a situation where local authority staff say to an academy, “well, you’ve been on the phone to me for 10 minutes, that’ll be 50 quid” is seen as being something to be avoided and makes officers uncomfortable. This attitude is similarly conveyed in the third quotation where the officer argues against the idea that “academies have to pay for everything.” There is thus a reluctance from officers to move to a completely market-based relationship between the local authority and individual school scales. One of the ways officers have attempted to conserve the older, non-transaction

based connection is to offer a free ‘keeping-in-touch’ meeting with every school. Officers argue that the latter has been valued by schools to such an extent that it has been increased from an annual visit to something which is done on a termly basis.

Despite officers trying to resist the local authority having an exclusively market-based relationship with individual schools, they express several concerns about being unable to manage the risks relating to the marketisation of services in Eastshire, which the highly academised landscape has largely contributed to. Some of these risks were described as follows:

I think it's swings and roundabouts and [sighs] erm. [pause] [sighs] I think it's a difficult one because as a Head I would think I'd rather buy what I want and get what I want, that's absolutely fine. However, the issue is, particularly in, in the times of falling funding across all councils – and not just education in councils – that [pause] sometimes schools don't perceive the need they'll *have*. So, if you take something like, erm, students with English as an additional language [EAL], you know, our demography in Eastshire is really variable and really changing. So at the moment you might have a school which has *no* children with EAL, or a very small number that they can manage in-house, and suddenly we have a community that moves, something changes and that school has 50 children who don't speak English *at all* – as I say, that's happened, Eastshire is quite weird in some of the changes it gets! And [pause] and if schools, if enough schools are not buying into services I'm not going to be able to keep funding it in the future, and so when that need arises, actually the service won't be there to provide it. So it's a *difficult balance*. (E-LA3)

I suppose the other issue is... Particularly for high, high needs services, it's how we balance the fact that actually incidents might be low but when you do have a child with very high needs, you do need an awful lot of support. So we have a number of services giving support to children with SEN [Special Educational Needs], for example, and if schools say, "well actually we don't have these needs any more, we don't want to buy the service," well actually... The service might not be there when they do have a child coming through with those needs.

NP: And a private, a business, say, wouldn't provide those services?

Probably not. We've not seen a major take up of –

NP: Is that because there is a low frequency and therefore –

Yes, indeed. (E-LA5)

I've closed quite a few services because they were quite *historical* and schools can – if there's a provider that can do it better somewhere else let them. I don't *mind* who provides it as long as there isn't – I think the issue is that [with] the less sexy things in school improvement private companies aren't interested in [them] because there isn't enough money in it and so therefore there could be vulnerable pupils and communities who fall through the gap. So it's how you *balance* the two. (E-LA3)

Interestingly, all the above concerns about possible risks are framed by officers as a dilemma relating to finding a ‘balance’. This balance refers to providing education services which satisfy the needs of individual schools but at the same time allow for the existence of a local authority with the capacity to supply services which may be needed by very few children or for future generations of children. Officers suggest that this balance will fail to be achieved if an exclusively market-driven provision of education services is put in place. It is clear that officers believe the local authority has the ability to identify and predict possible future changes which could affect the Eastshire area and that this is something the scale of an individual school is unable to do. This is underlined in the first and second quotations above which discuss the possibility of future needs emerging for particular educational services that are not currently demanded by schools. Officers highlight that the risk associated with this is that a future need may not be able to be addressed if services are provided on an exclusively demand-driven basis. Another key argument made by officers is that the local authority is able to operate on a basis that is not solely related to questions of profitability. The officer in the second quotation suggests that private companies are not interested in providing services which relate to low frequency needs and the third quotation argues that private companies are not interested in “less sexy things in school improvement” due to them being less profitable. Thus, officers deploy scalar practices to construct the local authority as a scale which is essential to the provision of education services – it is able to consider trends and needs across the Eastshire area and is willing to invest in services which are not necessarily the most profitable.

Academy principals and chairs of governors did not focus as much on the possible risks associated with the marketisation of services; this was consistent with their scalar practices which prioritised the needs of their individual school. During interviews, some comments were made about possible disadvantages being created in other schools in Eastshire but these tended to be vague – they referred to “others suffering” or “wider negative impacts” – which makes it difficult to understand whether specific reference was being made to the issue of education service provision. One of the few exceptions to this was the following reflection by an academy principal who made direct reference to the possible adverse effects of academies on the availability of education services for other schools in Eastshire:

I think, erm [pause] the other principle was about children’s entitlement. Erm, a feeling that if there was only so much money in the pot and funding [pause] was

not, you know, funding was coming direct to the school and not going into Eastshire, that some of xxxx [present academy]’s funding had helped to subsidise these services. [...] Because, because that, because *basically* [before becoming an academy] we didn’t get full value out of our money, we were top-sliced for common need. And I think that there was just a bit of concern over what services might go down because of it [academy conversion] and, and, you know, I think the principles of making a universal provision so all our entitlement to, you know, a standard service was an important one. I think the argument *against* that was that it *wasn’t* a universal service, [...] actually some of the money for our most needy children was never seen in this school. Because it was always allocated in *lump sums* to schools which hit certain postcodes. So, actually, we then got over that morally and said: well actually it gives us the right amount of money that *we* should be spending on children in *this* school. And we have – we’re a comprehensive intake – with children with, with *needs* that have *never* been met because the money’s always made at a decision-making level that’s not based on individuals, it’s made upon, it’s made on, on, on *schools* and we never, never, we never managed to hit those indices so *our* kids never benefit (E-P1)

This principal highlights that prior to converting to an academy the school had contributed to subsidising particular local authority services, which is described as being “top-sliced for common need.” Thus, the principal argues that the individual school scale was contributing to the wellbeing of schools across the local authority before becoming an academy. However, this moral dilemma is overcome by the principal shifting their scalar focus to argue that individual students in the school sometimes did not benefit from local authority spending due to the school being regarded as having needs that were lower in comparison to others in Eastshire. By shifting away from a focus on service provision at a local authority scale to that of the individual academy, this principal mobilises scalar practices which side-line the argument that academies are no longer helping to subsidise services at the local authority scale. This example illustrates the power of scalar practices in shaping the way actors make sense of policy and its implementation.

The Role of the Local Authority in an Academised Landscape

Eastshire officers also constructed a distinction between different scales when they discussed the local authority’s role in the context of a highly academised schooling landscape. Officers highlighted that the local authority could still provide important *knowledge* to academies, despite the latter no longer being accountable to Eastshire. The following quotations illustrate this argument:

we understand the local context (E-LA1)

You have here officers, many [people] who have worked in the local authority, who *know* the schools, they actually know the schools. (E-LA2)

Erm, and also we know the context of the communities. I think that's one of the things they [schools] really quite like is the fact that we know the area, we know the context, we know the history of the school as well and we know the improvement journey that it's been on, and so they see that as almost a kind of *unique selling point* in that we have that context. (E-LA3)

These quotations all underline how the local authority is constructed as having knowledge which is unique to the scalar position it occupies. All the comments above explain the local authority's knowledge to be offering an understanding of the historical, geographical and educational context of individual schools. Officers argue that knowledge of the Eastshire context is valued by schools, which is a scalar practice that serves to frame the local authority and individual school scales in a collaborative light.

However, officers also deployed scalar practices which made a *distinction* between the knowledge possessed by actors at the local authority scale and by actors at the individual school scale:

So I think what we tend to do is offer the external viewpoint on the school's performance. Erm, and our schools, our academies still value that, so, erm, yes, they're more than capable and there's enough information sent to them now where they get all the *datasets* and they get all of that – what *we're* able to do is benchmark that against Eastshire, benchmark it against similar schools in Eastshire [...] what we often [do] is sign post and broker them [schools] to other schools with a really good expertise, which they *may* know about but often they don't. People know about their own school and maybe one or two mates they get on with [laughs] but they don't necessarily know that the school on the other side of xxxx [area in Eastshire] has got a really good Head of English or whatever. (E-LA3)

I mean there's a unique role for the local authority around the role of the school. So we are uniquely able to talk to schools about what's going on in the local area, what are the plans in terms of housing, in terms of social care, community health information, erm, a place-shaping role I suppose. How do you sort of engage a school in its community? I believe this is very important which is why I think academies need to have local authorities. [...] So I think uniquely there's a planning, place-shaping role. (E-LA6)

The other kind of valuable scalar knowledge that officers emphasise the local authority offering schools relates to knowledge which is outside the scalar boundaries of an individual school. For example, the officer in the first quotation above describes how the local authority can help schools understand how their results relate to other schools in the

Eastshire area. The officer argues that this is more meaningful than schools simply being presented with performance data that is not placed in the Eastshire context. Another example of additional knowledge the local authority can provide to a school is to highlight relevant experts located in a different part of Eastshire that a school may not know about. Officers construct the local authority as having scalar knowledge which covers a more wide-ranging geographical outlook than that of an individual school. The officer quoted in the second comment above also highlights this by arguing how the local authority can “uniquely” talk to schools about wider planning work going on in Eastshire, for example, “in terms of housing, in terms of social care, [and] community health information”. Providing this kind of scalar knowledge is summarised by the officer as the local authority having a “place-shaping role”. Here officers construct the local authority as offering a distinct kind of knowledge to individual schools. They argue that the local authority has knowledge which relates to the entire Eastshire area, something which is contrasted to individual schools further down the scalar hierarchy whose knowledge is restricted to their narrower scalar boundaries.

Academy principals and chairs of governors did not emphasise the local authority’s knowledge to any great degree during their interviews. When asked about the role of the local authority only one chair of governors mentioned how it provided the academy with information about the general Eastshire area. The importance of local authority knowledge was therefore an issue that was emphasised by academy actors to a very limited extent compared to officers, something which was consistent with a scalar outlook that the local authority operates on a different scale to schools. This illustrates how officers’ deployment of scalar practices which emphasise the interrelated nature of the local authority and schools was incompatible with the scalar outlook of academy principals and governors.

Some officers also emphasised how the physical *proximity* of the local authority to Eastshire schools was an additional factor that indicated how the local authority could continue to support academies. The following quotations are examples of instances where officers discussed this:

And they [officers] can *get* to the schools in half an hour or an hour. And they know what has worked in School A and they can recommend that that is taken to School B...they can provide you with technical guidance or legal guidance or financial

guidance, very very quickly, very easily, so if you've got a serious problem, let's let's take [muffled] Say you've got a serious problem with a contractor or supplier... you can immediately ring up somebody in xxxx [location of local authority offices] and if necessary that person can come out and see you and talk through that problem with you and, and solve it. (E-LA2)

In relation to the buildings and the land and that sort of thing, where the local authority is quite, well, *local*, and has easy access to the schools so if the schools want adaptations or something like that then we're quite local and we can discuss. (E-LA4)

It is clear from these comments that the local authority and individual school scales are understood in geographical terms as being physically close to each other. Officers emphasise being able to “*get* to schools in half an hour or an hour” and how officers can visit schools at very short notice to meet and discuss any possible issues. The second quotation above underlines how the local authority and schools are both seen as being ‘local’ and yet this local is differentially scaled, with local authority officers needing to enter the school scale in order to provide any support. Officers’ scalar practices are intersecting with perceptions of geographical proximity in order to represent the relationship between the local authority and individual school scales.

However, similar to the issue of local authority knowledge, the perceived advantage of the local authority and school scales being physically proximate was not reflected in academy principal and governor responses. This suggests academy actors’ scalar practices and understandings are different to those of local authority officers. In this case, officers appear to emphasise the collaboration and interdependency of the two scales to a much greater degree compared to academy principals and governors.

The Scalar Strategy of School-to-School Partnerships

When discussing the implementation of the academies policy, Eastshire officers all emphasised how the policy heavily influenced the local authority’s choice to focus on promoting ‘school-to-school partnerships’. The latter strategy was considered to be the most viable in the context of shrinking local authority funds and the increased number of academies. This is because school-to-school partnerships involve the local authority acting as a mediator and facilitator between schools. School ‘partnerships’ are meant to involve schools supporting each other through the sharing of resources and knowledge. School-to-school partnerships can therefore be interpreted as a scalar strategy being promoted by the

local authority, since it involves shifting responsibility and focus away from the local authority scale to the individual school scale. Not only do officers construct a scalar boundary between the local authority and individual schools through this strategy, but they are also encouraging stronger links to be forged between individual schools – a scalar practice which attempts to make the school scale less fragmented. During the interviews local authority officers outlined this scalar strategy but their description was often followed by concerns or doubts about how it would be put into practice. The following comments are examples of these kinds of concern:

So our discussions with Eastshire Heads has been along the lines of, erm, we need to develop a more self-sustaining school model, and *that* should be based on partnerships of schools working together. The local authority should be a *partner* to those partnerships rather than being some strategic commissioner or apart from that process. Erm, and so far there has not been a great deal of dissent for that proposal from schools. [...] The biggest issue we've got is: *can* the sector challenge itself effectively? So is one school willing to challenge another in terms of their improvement or their standards? That's quite difficult to ask. (E-LA5)

So, you know, the converters, the group of academies [were] saying, "we're going to work together and support each other". Once they were through the other side of the [conversion] process they didn't carry that through. So they are now very isolated in the market. Erm, with assets that they can't afford to keep, erm, and with budgets that they can't afford to balance. Erm, and with a floor target system that continues to rise. [...] No authority can sit by and watch a school fail, but we haven't got, we practically haven't got the money to be able to support them. And I think in Eastshire politically, erm, it would be very difficult if we did support them. And we aren't *anywhere near* able to support them. So the rhetoric is all about supporting each other, but that means schools need to open their doors, I mean all you need is a Head or chair of governors who isn't aware of the risks and you've got quite a sort of precarious situation. (E-LA6)

The above quotations illustrate that officers have a range of concerns relating to the scalar strategy of school-to-school partnerships. In the first quotation an officer expresses a degree of scepticism over the overarching principle of the strategy and is unsure whether schools are able and willing to challenge each other. A different officer in the second quotation describes how academy converters signed up to work together but they have failed to put this into practice; the officer argues that this has resulted in them becoming “very isolated in the market”. Importantly, this officer also argues that the school partnership strategy is compatible with the political stance of Eastshire County Council members. The Council has a majority Conservative Party membership and their ideological position makes them resistant to the local authority supporting schools.

A common theme running through all of these concerns is, firstly, that this new scalar strategy involves the local authority having less agency over challenging and supporting schools and, secondly, that the strategy is entirely dependent on schools 'buying into' this scalar vision. Although the local authority is characterised as being a 'partner' to school partnerships it is clear that officers are limited in practice by a lack of financial resources. In addition to this, officers also face resistance to engaging with individual schools due to the political commitments of Eastshire County Council Conservative Party members. Overall, there is a sense amongst officers that the individual school scale remains highly fragmented and individualised and the greatest challenge is to create greater scalar unity between schools. The ability to actually achieve the latter becomes an even greater challenge in the context of the local authority having less agency and resources to deploy in the promotion of this scalar strategy.

This scepticism about school partnerships was not articulated as frequently among principals and governors as it was among officers, however some doubts were present. The following is a particularly interesting quotation from one principal who reflected on the position of an individual school in relation to the promotion of partnerships:

I think there's a lot of, there's a lot of *questions* and dilemma [...] around: what is the nature of the system? And, you know, with, what has, what seems to be created is this sort of *market-based, consumerist-driven*, erm, education system that [is] sort of modelled on a kind of pseudo-, well, a *pseudo-market*, kind of, erm... I don't know, sort of, practice, with parents as *consumers, parental choice*, you know, you buy, you make the decision to send your child *there*, therefore that's the product you're *buying*, you know, therefore if I'm *buying* that product then I expect high quality customer service [...] Erm, but a self-improving system actually, you know, does Apple get on the phone to whoever its, its leading competitor is and say, "you know, d'you know what, we're having difficulties with this little iPad we're kind of working on, you know, can you, erm, can you come and give us sort of support and...?" Well *that* doesn't happen, does it? You know, and that, *that's* the problem with, in a sense we've got *tensions* within a system [pause] that it can't decide, and that's why, you know, in a sense that the market, consumerist system has created, but then you're saying actually we want a self-improving, focus on professional capital, development of, of teachers and development of schools within a system, but actually how can those two be *reconciled*? (E-P2)

The principal here expresses doubts over whether school-to-school partnerships can be relied on to be the main drivers for educational improvement. Individual schools are understood to be part of a 'market' with parents as consumers which, in turn, creates

competition and rivalry between schools. A tension therefore emerges for this principal whereby school partnerships are being encouraged in a context where individual schools are in competition with each other and therefore, like businesses, it may not be in their best interest to invest resources into helping ‘rival’ schools. Thus, this principal shows a self-awareness of their own scalar practices whereby they make sense of policies primarily in terms of an individual school scale, which the principal argues is a difficult scalar outlook to break out of in the context of a competitive school market.

The Academies Policy and Institutional Identity

One of the most striking aspects of how Eastshire academy principals and chairs of governors made sense of the implementation process was that this was anchored in their institutional identity. As was mentioned in Chapter 4, the academies included in the study had long been established as ‘community colleges’ or ‘area colleges’. Both prior to becoming an academy and after conversion these institutional identities assumed a central position in deliberations and decisions around implementation. During the interview process principals and governors underlined not only how there was an initial fear that academy status presented a threat to their historical institutional identity, but also how this identity remained intact regardless of the school’s new status. One of the ways this manifested itself is that academies did not replace ‘community college’ or ‘area college’ with ‘academy’ in their institutional name. Principals and governors were asked about this during the interview; the following comments were typical responses:

I think it’s a bit like Marks and Spencer, I mean, it’s a brand people trust, xxxx [academy name] is a, is, I mean it’s a 75 year-old brand, erm, it means more than ‘academy’ I think to people in this area. It’s a very *local* [pause] particular thing. Erm, and it’s very, the *area college* part of it is part of a, a very old tradition of commitment to community education [...] you know, people, people *adhere* to that philosophy in this area and there are lots of area colleges because it’s a very romantic philosophy that somehow the school is not, not just represents a school but, erm, is the *hub* for all community activity in the village (E-P1)

Some transient political phenomenon called 'academies' [laughs] *why* would we betray that incredible pedigree [of being an area college], you know. So, no, there was *never any question* of us changing our name from xxxx area college, no. Because we, we're perfectly well aware that another government will come along in five years' time or 10 years' time or 15 years' time and say, "well, you're not going to be an academy any more, you're going to be a *trust* or you're going to be a *community* school or *cooperative* school or *district* school" or whatever it might be, and the

answer from us is, "*fine*, give us whatever status you like, but we're going to continue to be called 'xxxx area college'." (E-G4)

That was important to the school because, because one of the, one of the, erm, complaints people made was: this is a community school that serves its community; the xxxx academy [present academy] will not be a community school and will not serve its community. That was the sense a few ideological opponents had. So in keeping the name we were sending a very *strong* message to everybody. We were 'xxxx community college' and we still are. (E-P3)

That would have just been a... a parental red rag really, it would've antagonised sections for no particular reason. It's entirely an irrational thing but by using the name 'academy' in the title of the school, it would have just made things just that little bit more tricky, people would have objected to that [...] So I think the loss of the 'community' bit from the title, that would have been the issue. I think 'xxxx school' going to 'xxxx academy' would have been no difficulty, but to go from community college [to being called an academy] – with all the connotations that 'community' has – would have been the issue. (E-P4)

It is clear that the 'community college' or 'area college' name of these academies is deployed in the representational practices of actors to symbolically indicate how academy status has not changed the identity of these institutions. Both these types of school were associated with a particular definition of what it meant to be a 'local' school. According to principals and governors, what makes these schools 'local' is that they serve their 'community,' which either relates to the school's catchment area or village. As is evident in the first two quotations above, this scalar identity is understood to be part of "a very old tradition" or "pedigree" which has endured various policy reforms. There is such a commitment to the way institutional identities have been defined in relation to community colleges and area colleges which has meant that this scalar construct remains highly resilient to other policy narratives, including academies. This is reflected in how one governor dismisses the academies policy as a "transient political phenomenon."

Excluding 'academy' from the institution's name was also consciously chosen to be something which would send "a strong message" to any concerned stakeholders that academy status was going to alter a school's identity. This is conveyed in the third and fourth quotations where community college principals argue that removing 'community' from the institutional name would have caused resistance to converting to academy status as it would suggest the school was going to be adopting a different scalar focus. The principal in the final quotation demonstrates a lack of personal belief in the importance of institutional name, calling the issue 'entirely irrational.' Also, by describing the prospect of

changing the school name as something which would be a “parental red rag” the principal further reveals a personal perspective that considers the emphasis placed on the ‘academy’ label as unimportant. However, what is of greatest significance is that this principal ensured that the academy continued to be called a community college despite holding a personal view that the label was not of great importance.

The manner with which academy principals and chairs of governors discussed issues relating to their institutional accountability sheds further light on the scalar practices embedded in their policy work. With the shift to academy status meaning that schools are no longer officially accountable to the local authority, many schools were concerned about and challenged over how they were going to be adequately accountable as an academy. Principals and governors discussed accountability by deploying scalar arguments, and the following comments are typical of this:

So one of their [the board of governors’] key reservations was, for example was, academies have no accountability to their local community. My key answer to that was the majority, the greatest number of governors of the school parents, and all of our parents come from the local community, they are in the majority as a group within our governors. We *are* accountable therefore because the governors are the key stakeholders of any academy actually. And we have 7 out of 20 governors who are parents – well *that's* accountability. And I also persuaded them of all the things we already did to consult parents about everything. We consult our parents about *everything* we do. And I, I was at pains to say: none of that will change. We will continue to be very engaging with our parents and we *have* been. (E-P3)

in terms of the other things we discussed were [pause] it's a community school so how would community representation be maintained? We decided to keep the governing body at its current size and composition so that we're now the same governing body, erm – in terms of number of parent governors, number of trust governors [...] (E-G3)

So after we'd become an academy, erm, and talked to the governors, we thought that we should find some way to get, to as it were – even though we not obliged to – to make ourselves locally accountable. So in Eastshire it turns out that the City Council has area meetings and our area meeting is called the xxxx [area within Eastshire] Area Council. So I wrote to the chair of the xxxx Area Council and said, "would you like, you know, the headteacher and the chair of governors of xxxx [academy] to come along to your next meeting? And, you know, give a brief account of what's happened this year and invite feedback questions or comments from the floor." [...] because that kind of in person, *physically local* stuff seems to be much more what accountability means (E-G2)

It is clear that governors are considered to be the key actors through which ‘local accountability’ can be achieved. The first two quotations above describe how fears regarding academies not being accountable to their ‘local community’ were overcome by emphasising how governors were members of the community. In addition, the principal in the first quotation underlines how consulting parents about academy decisions is another key way to ensure local accountability is achieved. The chair of governors in the third quotation described how an academy took a slightly different approach to the issue of local accountability. In this case the governor attended an ‘Area Council’ meeting which corresponded to an area within Eastshire (and the academy’s catchment area). It was commented that this kind of meeting was “*physically local*”, thus emphasising how scalar practices emphasise how the ‘local’ is embedded in a geographical space that is smaller than the Eastshire local authority area. Schools articulate feeling responsible towards students and parents and define ‘local accountability’ and ‘community’ as relating to the immediate area around their academy; through these practices, the local authority area is thus excluded and considered to be a different, more distant scale.

Summary

It is clear that policy actors’ understandings of the academies policy in the case of Eastshire highlight the two scales of the local authority and individual academy. The discussion has underlined how the implementation of academies has been understood by these actors through scalar practices which emphasise the importance of the individual school scale above that of the local authority. These practices also constructed individual schools in Eastshire as being distant from the local authority scale rather than closely embedded within it. This was clearly conveyed in officers’ explanations that the choice over whether to take on academy status was firmly located at the individual school scale. By doing this they constructed a scalar boundary between themselves and academies.

Principals and chairs of governors discussed their choice to convert their school to an academy by also emphasising the individual school scale above all else. This was particularly striking when some of these actors recognised the potential negative effects of lower local authority funding on other schools in Eastshire as a result of funds being re-distributed to academies. Many actors expressed being personally opposed to this but overcame the dilemma by deploying a scalar practice which actively *shifted* their scalar focus to the needs

of their individual school. Through this shifting scalar practice they showed how their priority was their individual school rather than the local authority scale.

Eastshire actors consistently linked the academies policy to the local authority's development of an education services package which academies can opt to purchase. When officers described the education services market they deployed scalar practices which constructed a boundary between the school and local authority scales, for example by making a distinction between academy 'customers' and the local authority 'provider'. Officers also articulated concerns over possible risks associated with service provision being dictated by the demands of a 'market' of individual schools. The risks posed to individual schools were proposed by officers to be solved by the local authority, a scalar shift which attempted to emphasise the importance of the local authority scale in education services. This was not articulated by principals and chairs of governors as these actors continued to adopt scalar practices which prioritised the needs of the individual school scale.

When describing what the local authority can provide academies, officers argued that they had a detailed understanding of each individual school and could also offer academies knowledge about the wider Eastshire area. By emphasising this, officers represented the local authority as offering individual academies valuable knowledge and revealed a scalar practice of emphasising the *interrelatedness* of the two scales. Officers' scalar practices also intersected with arguments about being geographically proximate to schools and used this to emphasise the close relationship between the local authority and school scales. These scalar practices were not mirrored in the accounts of principals and chairs of governors, illustrating how the latter actors continued to emphasise the individual school scale as being distinct and independent.

The local authority's strategy of encouraging school-to-school partnerships in Eastshire was underpinned by an incentive to forge relationships between schools. However, scepticism and concerns over this strategy revealed how officers perceived schools and academies as behaving in a highly individualised manner, partly due to operating in a competitive schooling landscape. This conveyed how Eastshire actors working in academies made sense of their policy work by constructing boundaries between themselves and other schools.

The institutional identity of individual academies was deeply integrated in how principals and chairs of governors made sense of their policy decisions. These actors rejected the possibility of the academies policy changing their identity and underlined that their individual institution was their primary scalar focus. Importantly, this identity was never linked to the Eastshire area; rather, it remained narrowly defined according to the specific area surrounding a school. In addition, individual academies articulated how they could be adequately ‘accountable’ in light of their academy status. Their arguments revealed scalar practices whereby being ‘accountable’ related to the ‘community’ and geographical area immediately surrounding the individual school. Once again, these practices revealed how actors in Eastshire conducted their policy work by considering the individual school scale as being separate and distant from the scale of the local authority. Scalar practices constructed a boundary between the individual school and local authority scale however in this case it was *implied* through the complete *absence* of Eastshire from academies’ institutional identities and sense of accountability.

Discussion

This chapter has demonstrated how constructions of individual academy and local authority scales have been central to the sense-making activities of actors implementing the academies policy. On the surface this may not seem particularly insightful; after all, the official narrative of academies focuses on shifting the relationship between schools and local authorities. However, by approaching scale as a category of practice, the discussion has illustrated how the individual school and local authority scales mean very different things to different actors and how these meanings are embedded in the contexts of Northwestern and Eastshire. Thus, new insights have been developed into how claims around ‘individual school’ and ‘local authority’ scales which are made in national policy narratives are actually interpreted by policy actors faced with challenges and dilemmas of implementation. The dominant scalar practices in Northwestern constructed the local authority as an essential part of the process of implementing academies, and individual schools were typically regarded as *nested within* the local authority scale. In Eastshire, the most common scalar practices constructed individual schools as being the scale of greatest importance in relation to academies and a *boundary* between the individual school and local authority scales was consistently emphasised.

The importance of examining these scalar practices has been underlined by showing how the strategic deployment of the individual school and local authority scales has been consistent with the policy visions and work being pursued by different actors. Emphasising the local authority scale in Northwestern and how schools are integrated in this scale has been a scalar strategy which has served to reinforce the policy vision underpinning the Northwestern Academies Model. In Eastshire, constructing the individual school scale as being the most significant consideration in relation to the academies policy reflects the chosen strategy of both local authority and academy actors which approached academy conversion as a choice for individual schools to make. It can thus be argued that scalar practices provide a window through which we can understand how actors perform their policy work in order to pursue particular strategies.

By closely examining how actors use scale as a category of practice four key scalar practices have been identified from the empirical material. All four of these were also identified as being deployed by actors in their construction of ‘the national’ scale in Chapter 5. The first of these scalar practices involves the *construction of boundaries*. This was particularly central to Eastshire actors’ approach to the academies policy as they described how their work was based on the assumption of the local authority and individual academy scales being separate and distinct from each other. It was most obvious in the way all actors understood the issue of academy conversion to relate to individual school choice and as something which was separate from the local authority. Boundary-constructing scalar practices were also deployed to emphasise the distinctiveness of and separation *between* individual schools in Eastshire. Thus, the construction of boundaries in this way has contributed to individual academies having an outlook which considers the pursuit of their individual interests as the only feasible option available to them. Similar scalar practices were prevalent to a far more limited degree in Northwestern. Competition amongst individual schools and academies was an issue which mobilised scalar practices that constructed boundaries between individual schools. A boundary was also created between the local authority and individual academy scales during incidents where some sponsors and principals disagreed with local authority officers’ involvement in academies. These boundary-constructing scalar practices represented a threat to the scalar vision of the Northwestern Academies Model, highlighting

how scalar practices need to suppress alternative practices if they are to become or remain dominant.

The second kind of scalar practice which actors frequently deployed was to *strategically shift* between scales. More specifically, actors would consistently shift their scalar focus back to the scale they considered to be most important. In Northwestern, discussions about the individual academy scale consistently shifted back to the local authority scale. In Eastshire, questions about whether the academies policy had an impact on the local authority area as a whole tended to be overcome by shifting the focus back to the needs of individual schools.

The third scalar practice identified was one which *dissolved boundaries* between scales. This was the most dominant practice underpinning the scalar project of the Northwestern Academies Model. Boundaries between individual academies and the local authority area were consistently undermined by the majority of actors who emphasised how all Northwestern schools were nested within the city area and that they all contributed to the overarching vision of the local authority. Dissolving scalar boundaries was a practice which did not manifest itself in Eastshire actors' representations or actions; this is consistent with the prevailing construction of local authority and individual school scales as being separate from each other.

The fourth scalar practice identified in this chapter was to emphasise the *interrelatedness of scales*. Scales remain separate in this practice but they are represented as being dependent and related rather than entirely distinct. This practice manifested itself to a limited degree in Eastshire when officers described how the local authority provided knowledge to individual academies which was of great importance and relevance. Underlining how academies still had much to benefit from collaborating with the local authority can be understood as an alternative scalar practice deployed by Eastshire officers; it is in tension with the dominant scalar practice of constructing a clear boundary between the local authority and individual school scales. However, representing scales as interconnected was a practice which remained largely side-lined.

By examining the scalar practices which have been mobilised by actors implementing academies, the discussion has also revealed how these practices are connected to

interpretations of the material conditions of actors' policy worlds. Scalar practices associated with constructing academies in relation to the local authority scale in Northwestern were interlinked with a perception that the local authority covers a relatively small geographical area. Although Eastshire local authority officers attempted to mobilise perceptions of material conditions in a similar way so as to suggest they were physically proximate to schools, these arguments remained vague rather than firmly focused on material conditions. The complete absence of this sense of physical proximity to the local authority in the accounts of Eastshire academy principals and governors illustrates how perceptions of material conditions served to reinforce the practice of emphasising the individual school scale rather than the Eastshire-wide scale. These dynamics point to how policy actors' perceptions of material conditions and geographical environment were interconnected with their mobilisations of scalar practices.

The analysis of the empirical findings which have been presented in this chapter and Chapter 5 have illustrated how scalar practices feature heavily in actors' accounts of implementing the academies policy. Scalar practices involve actors using scalar categories as a way of interpreting their social worlds as well as actors strategically constructing and framing policy through scale. The chapters have distilled several features of these scalar practices and how these strategies have been used to promote particular understandings of policy and suppress others. However, the empirical material does not only illustrate scalar practices and point to some of their key features. These insights also appear to indicate that scalar practices are being guided by particular kinds of politics. The latter involves the mobilisation of key overarching concepts which contribute to the creation of normative meanings around how the academies policy ought to be implemented. It is these issues which the next chapter will seek to explore.

CHAPTER 7

The Practice of Scalecraft

The two preceding empirical chapters have approached scale as a category of practice and explored how actors use scalar categories as they go about making sense of their social worlds. The notion of ‘scalar practices’ has been used to refer to how actors use categories of scale “not just to interpret spatial politics, but to frame and define, and thereby constitute and organise, social life” (Moore 2008: 218). The two case studies have revealed that actors interpret and strategically approach policy by mobilising four key scalar practices. The scalar practices which have been identified are: constructing scalar boundaries, dissolving scalar boundaries, shifting between different scales, and emphasising the interrelatedness of scales. Scalar practices have reflected the way actors interpret their policy work as well as how actors actively frame and construct policy to pursue particular strategies. A key part of what policy actors do is to represent and make sense of their work which is what makes the deployment of scale in this way an integral part of *practice*. In Northwestern, the dominant scalar practices resulted in understanding the academies policy in relation to the local authority scale. In the case of Eastshire, the overriding scalar practices related to highlighting the individual school as the scale which was most relevant to implementing academies. In both cases, the dominant scalar practices were deeply connected to the way in which the national, local authority and individual school scales were strategically co-constructed.

In this chapter I develop a theoretical approach which not only focuses on the nature of scalar practices deployed by policy actors but also on what kind of political concepts underpin these practices. I suggest that this be called the practice of *scalecraft*.

Scalecraft is a concept that can also be found in the human geography literature but I use the concept to develop a different theoretical focus here. The term was introduced in an article by Alistair Fraser (2010) but has since not been developed further by other authors or Fraser himself. This thesis refers to the practice of scalecraft as the process involving the

deployment of scalar practices which intersects with the mobilisation of particular kinds of politics. My theoretical approach has been constructed from the dialogue between interpretive approaches to policy and human geography literature on scale (outlined in Chapter 3), together with the analysis of the empirical insights presented in Chapters 5 and 6. By developing this idea of scalecraft I aim to convey how critical approaches to scale can contribute novel insights into the practices of policy and its underlying politics.

This chapter argues that dominant practices of scalecraft in the context of the academies policy can be understood to be the product of policy actors drawing on the following three concepts: ‘the state’, ‘market’ and ‘community’. The discussion which follows aims to highlight how the concepts of the state, market and community are assembled through the practices of scalecraft, and how this both enables and restricts the ways actors manipulate scale in relation to policy. Actors practice scalecraft in such a way that actively shapes the meanings of the state, market and community and, simultaneously, scalecraft activities are themselves shaped by existing dominant understandings of these three concepts. While the empirical data reveals a complex picture of the state, market and community being simultaneously at play, the way each concept is deployed through the practice of scalecraft will be discussed separately to provide analytical clarity. Before discussing this I will explain how analysis has led to the development of the three concepts of the state, market and community.

The State, Market and Community: Analytical Development

Chapter 2 outlined the reforms and governance dynamics associated with the academies policy and highlighted how these are characterised by centralised pressure from the state as well as the advance of market logic. Within my analysis of policy actors’ scalar practices in Chapters 5 and 6 I identified that the empirical material reflects these concepts of the state and the market. The concept of ‘the state’ relates to the increasing centralisation of education governance; this is characterised by the state no longer exerting control in a direct, hierarchical manner but instead by governing through indirect means such as guidelines, incentives and inspection. While understandings of the state have moved beyond traditional understandings of hierarchy to an appreciation of the wide network of agencies and actors involved in governing, it is clear from the empirical material in Chapter 5 how

‘the national’ scale closely fitted this concept of a state governor, and that the latter continues to be imagined by actors as being at the top of the scalar hierarchy.

The concept of the ‘market’ (as explained in Chapter 2) refers to the logics of individual choice, self-interest, producer-consumer relations, competition and zero-sum games which have come to dominate the way schooling is considered in England. Policy actors deployed scalar practices in a manner that was shaped by the idea that they were operating in a schooling market; simultaneously, these actors actively adopted and constructed market logics in their policy practices.

Thus, the concepts of the state and market have already been used to characterise the academies policy in existing literature, and analysis subsequently found these concepts to be closely mirrored in the scalar practices identified in the empirical material. However, understanding scalecraft solely in relation to these two concepts gave an incomplete reflection of the policy work being practiced by the actors in Northwestern and Eastshire. The empirical material pointed to something more than a politics of market logic coupled with state governing pressures and it was from this attempt to create a more complete theoretical understanding of the empirical world that I developed the additional concept of ‘community’.

The empirical data illustrated how actors’ constructions of scale drew heavily on ideas which suggested a sense of situated belonging and being part of an imagined collective. In Northwestern, this overwhelmingly focused on the city-wide, local authority scale and in Eastshire this related to the individual academy scale. It was from these ideas that the concept of ‘community’ was incorporated into the analysis, a term which has been described as “a loosely specified sense of social collectivity” (Liepins 2000: 25). Characterising community in this manner links to the work of Anthony Cohen (1985) whose interpretivist understandings of community emphasised it to be socially constructed and symbolic. This conceptualisation of community appeared to provide the additional missing platform through which to explore practices of scalecraft that were being expressed in the empirical material. The way in which practices of scalecraft intersect with these concepts of the state, market and community will now be examined in detail.

Scalecraft and the State

The State in Northwestern

Scalecraft practices mobilised the concept of the state and this was particularly made apparent by scrutinising actors' constructions of the 'national' scale. The way in which a 'national' scale was deployed in Northwestern revealed how all policy actors perceived a disconnect to exist between themselves and the state. Local authority officers focused on how academies have been framed as being an opportunity for schools to escape 'local authority control' and argued that this narrative of the state had no correlation with their own policy realities. Academy sponsors also described how they were often unable to relate to the state narrative of the academies policy. For example, this was highlighted by the way in which two sponsors initially rejected the idea of becoming involved in the policy initiative, which they explained was due to the national policy vision being incongruent with their scalar priorities being focused on Northwestern. A different sponsor also articulated a sense of disconnect with the state by emphasising how London was physically distant from the issues and challenges faced by the academy. For this sponsor, the state is distant and lacks understanding as a result of existing both on a different scale as well as in a different geographical location. Academy principals also conveyed a sense of disconnect between what they perceived as the unfair, sporadic evaluation of their work from Ofsted inspectors and Department officials operating on behalf of the state and their own long-term, continuous implementation efforts. In addition, some academy principals reflected on how they felt that the national policy narrative of academies was not representative of their own experiences of running an academy.

These issues reveal that a major way in which the state was conceptualised by policy actors in Northwestern was to be regarded as a distant source of governing pressures. Scalar practices of constructing a boundary between Northwestern actors and the state were particularly important here. The way in which the academies policy has been interpreted has involved constructing the top of the vertical hierarchy as something which is distant and disconnected from the context of Northwestern and the experiences of Northwestern actors. The national policy narrative of academies continues to be transmitted by the state, however actors are able to re-fashion the policy through practices of scalecraft in order for academies to be more closely aligned to their own priorities. At different times – for

example when academy actors were being evaluated or interacting with distant, London-based agencies of the state – scalecraft was practiced in an attempt to resist the state. The scale of Northwestern was deployed in such a way which emphasised the importance of the city context in understanding academies and was something which subsequently clashed with what actors perceive to be the scalar focus of the state. To summarise, a typical way Northwestern actors understood the state was to describe it as exerting governing pressures; scalecraft was often practised in response to these experiences of a state governor, where the scale of the local authority was emphasised in such a way that constructed the academies policy to be meaningful to the Northwestern context.

While the scalar practices of Northwestern policy actors often framed the state as being distant, they also experienced being governed by the state in a more direct, ‘top-down’ manner. In the case of academy principals this was most apparent in the way they described feeling under intense scrutiny from state agencies and actors both prior to and after the opening of their academies. At the planning stages the state was constructed as being a governor which needs to be satisfied and as having exclusive authority to give the final ‘go ahead’ for an academy to open. The sense of pressure and scrutiny emanating from the national scale was underlined in relation to academy performance. The latter was overwhelmingly associated with the Ofsted inspectorate as well as the DfE – agencies of the state who were perceived as being uncompromising in their judgements. This sense of being subject to direct governance by the state was also articulated by sponsors in the context of a range of situations. Being instructed to open an academy early, decreasing the number of years an academy was given to reach national attainment levels, and inspecting academies without any perceived allowance for difficult local conditions are all examples of sponsors’ experiences of state actors being instructive and uncompromising in their judgements. Thus, this illustrates how constructing the policy implementation process as a vertical hierarchy is also an aspect of scalecraft practices, where the concept of a ‘top-down’ state is mobilised to make sense of this.

The issue where Northwestern actors demonstrated having the greatest degree of agency and determination to practice scalecraft on their own terms when interacting with state actors was in relation to negotiating the Northwestern Academies Model. Local authority officers regarded the national policy environment as a means through which to serve the

needs of the city. A key example of this was how officers strategically embraced the academies policy in order to combine it with a different policy (*Building Schools for the Future*) as a way of maximising the capital investment for all local authority schools. Officers therefore practiced scalecraft in such a way that resulted in them engaging with national policy in order to achieve different aims to those outlined by the state. Indeed, the academies policy was described by officers in a manner that demonstrated a sense of pride in being able to manipulate policy to serve the interests of Northwestern – no attempt was made to disguise how their scalecraft practices were achieving different aims to those outlined by the state’s narrative.

Another key characteristic of negotiations around the Northwestern Academies Model was that officers argued that City Council members openly regarded the concerns of the state to be secondary or even irrelevant in comparison to their own agenda for the city. The adapted model of academies proposed by local authority officers was resisted by state actors. However, officers demonstrated a strong conviction that the state could be challenged and made to concede to the demands of the local authority regarding how the policy ought to be implemented. This confidence in practising scalecraft was also linked to officers’ scalar practices which emphasised the interconnectedness of scale. Officers acted with the conviction that Northwestern was a city of symbolic importance to the New Labour government that was in power at the time of the negotiations; this was regarded as a key reason for officers pursuing their scalecraft goals with confidence and success.

Thus, the concept of the state as a hierarchical governor intersected with scalecraft practices in various ways to both enable and restrict Northwestern actors. In the case where the state was experienced to be governing indirectly, it was a form of governing which gave actors sufficient flexibility to emphasise the interests and ambitions of the local authority scale in the implementation of the academies policy. On the other hand, when the state was experienced as exerting stronger and more direct pressure, actors in Northwestern articulated a sense of being bound by state demands and therefore felt restricted to the degree in which they could engage in the crafting of scale in a manner that they would prefer. It would appear that a key factor leading to the successful implementation of the Northwestern Academies Model was the determination of Northwestern officers that they could convince state actors to accept this. Although placing the local authority scale at the

centre of the academies policy went against the national policy narrative, an open disregard for the policy aims of the state as well as the perception that Northwestern was of political importance were key factors which intersected with the scalecraft strategy which allowed the scalar project to be successfully implemented.

The State in Eastshire

The way in which actors in Eastshire constructed the ‘national’ scale revealed how they perceived the state to be exerting governance pressures indirectly or from a distance. Local authority officers, academy principals and chairs of governors all emphasised how they characterised the state, which they understood to be at the top of the scalar hierarchy, as being physically distant and occupying a separate geographical domain to themselves. Academy principals and governors also argued that their relationship with the national was of an impersonal nature due to state actors being physically distant from them. Actors acting on behalf of state agencies were described as ‘nameless people’ with whom academy actors had no rapport. Local authority officers expressed frustration towards the state in relation to the national policy narrative which contended that schools were becoming liberated from local authority ‘control’ via academy status. Officers argued that this notion of ‘control’ was being used for ideological reasons and that their own experience was at odds with this narrative. Also, discussions about the need for a ‘middle tier’ to be re-introduced in the governance of schooling and the unfeasibility of academies being directly accountable to the state also served to underline the state being experienced as a distant, disconnected governor. By discussing this disconnect between the national policy narrative and their own policy experiences, local authority officers deployed scalar practices that represented a boundary existing between themselves and the state. The notion of the state being physically distant intersected with arguments made by officers, principals and governors that the state lacks knowledge which is of relevance to the individual school scale. By emphasising how the state was too distant to understand the detail of what policy means at the individual school scale, Eastshire actors were able to advance their preference for understanding the academies policy on the basis of the individual school scale rather than any other. The latter is another example of how when the state was perceived to be distant, policy actors harnessed this to advance their preferred scalar emphasis when implementing policy.

A further sense of disconnect between the state and Eastshire academy principals and governors was apparent when the latter expressed suspicion towards the former. For example, some actors were unable to fully trust that they would receive the extra funding that was promised to them by the state once they converted to an academy. This underlined an attitude where actors felt disconnected from and negative towards the state. Similarly, academy actors did not feel that they were accountable to the state in any meaningful way, despite academy status officially making this accountability relationship more direct. This sense of suspicion and lack of accountability towards a state which exerts indirect governance pressures was mobilised by these actors to justify practices whereby they pursued the interests of their individual school when implementing the academies policy, rather than considering any aims set out by the state. In addition, because there was no sense that the state was working in the best interests of schools, the principals and governors saw this as a further reason to prioritise their individual school needs above all else.

Experiencing the state as being distant and governing in an indirect manner did not always mean that this gave actors flexibility to dictate how they strategically deployed scale. The way in which academy principals and governors felt governed by financial incentives and reputational risk when they were considering whether to take on academy status was not related to a state directive. However, the financial incentives and reputational risk were experienced as a very powerful drive to encourage schools to convert. Indeed, principals and governors argued that the state had intentionally set up these incentives and risks in order to push schools into converting. There was therefore a sense that the state – together with the notion of operating in a ‘school marketplace’ – had forced actors to prioritise the individual school scale in a way that made this scalar perspective seem like the only available option to them.

However, the choice to convert to academy status was not exclusively about the state exerting pressure on schools to convert. Some academy principals and governors reflected on how their decision was also based on their attempt to actively manage their relationship with the state. By converting to academy status academy actors calculated that this would put them in a favourable position in the eyes of state actors. Their scalar practices thus emphasised the interconnectedness between themselves and the state in these instances.

Although principals and governors felt pressured by the state into practising scalecraft in such a way that prioritised the scale of their individual school, they simultaneously took an active role in emphasising their own scalar domains and in manoeuvring themselves into a position where they would be considered in a positive light by the state.

While actors in Eastshire gave accounts of being governed by indirect state governing pressures, their scalar practices also emphasised how the state was exerting powerful and direct attempts to govern them. In the case of local authority officers, these actors described feeling governed by the uncertainty of policy messages emanating from state actors. Officers perceived this uncertainty to be the result of a direct, top-down state drive to implement the academies policy as quickly as possible. The latter was regarded by Eastshire officers to result in many details being overlooked by state actors and this led to subsequent uncertainty being created for officers about a range of implementation issues. The scalar practices adopted to describe this uncertainty indicate how officers felt constrained by decisions being made by the state. The relationship with the state is therefore characterised as officers being at the bottom of the scalar hierarchy and reacting to state directives which, in turn, diminishes their agency.

This is further emphasised by the way in which officers argued that opposing the academies policy would have been a very risky endeavour and that the ‘neutral’ stance of the local authority was the ‘path of least resistance’. The manner in which local authority officers questioned certain aspects of the policy and directed enquiries at state actors about this also highlighted how they constructed the state as a powerful governor. Officers described presenting problems to the DfE by making careful, non-confrontational suggestions rather than directly stating that they disagreed with certain decisions that had been made in relation to academies. The perceived ‘top-down’ nature of the state here is striking. Instead of making sense of the academies policy by actively emphasising the individual school scale or even the local authority scale, officers describe being at the receiving end of state directives.

The discussion has highlighted how the practice of scalecraft in Eastshire has involved actors mobilising their perceptions of the state exerting indirect governing pressures. This has been conveyed by the way in which the national scale has been constructed as the

distant source of governing technologies. One experience of the latter is that this governing has limited Eastshire actors' choices and encouraged them to prioritise the scale of their individual school when engaging with the academies policy. Another reaction to the perception of a distant state governor operating from the top of the scalar hierarchy was for actors to engage with academies to maximise individual school interests rather than consider the goals specified at the national scale. In addition, perceptions of a distant state governor in Eastshire also intersected with scalar practices where actors manoeuvred themselves to be in a favourable position with the state. Finally, perceptions of the state also involved officers describing 'top-down' state directives which appeared to incapacitate the ability of these actors to take an active role in the practice of scalecraft.

Scalecraft and Market Logic

Market Logic in Northwestern

Discussions about the academies policy in Northwestern were consistently related to the decision to change the provision of education services to a market model. The empirical findings revealed that when officers discussed the issue they deployed scalar practices which resulted in a shift in their scalar focus. This shift involved moving from the dominant scalar project of relating the academies policy to the local authority scale to a focus on the individual school scale. This was highlighted by the way in which officers justified changing to an education services market – they argued that individual academies and schools should have the choice to decide which services to buy and which provider to purchase them from. It is clear that market principles of individual choice are intersecting with actors' scalecraft practices here. It would therefore appear that a market logic which promotes 'consumer choice' and the pursuit of individual interests is congruent with scalecraft practices which emphasise the individual school scale. At first glance, this could be interpreted as fragmenting or undermining the scalar project of the Northwestern Academies Model. However, it would be misleading to argue this in the case of Northwestern; crucially, during discussions about an education services market, local authority officers consistently returned to the focus of their scalar project which was to emphasise all schools being embedded in the local authority area. Thus, the academies policy was crafted in relation to the local authority scale by the dominant practice of scalecraft mobilising the idea of a city-wide *community* (this is discussed later on in the chapter).

An additional issue which appeared to present a threat to the scalar project of the Northwestern Academies Model was the issue of competition between schools. The academies policy was argued by many actors to have increased the sense of competition between schools in Northwestern. Non-academy schools were generally described as feeling threatened by the development of new academies. This was particularly the case when new academies were built within the catchment areas of existing schools and there was a subsequent sense of competitiveness over student numbers. The Northwestern Model's original vision was for all schools and academies to foster cohesive ties with each other and collaborate for the educational achievement of all young people in the local authority area. However, this scalar vision has been undermined somewhat by the principals of individual schools and academies deploying scalar practices which construct boundaries between their individual institution and other schools. It would appear that school principals experience the pressure of conforming to the logic of the 'marketplace' far more intensely than other actors in Northwestern. These understandings of market dynamics can be seen to intersect with principals' scalecraft practices in such a way that results in these actors placing greatest emphasis on the individual school scale by mobilising market principles of competition and the pursuit of individual interests. In addition, principals' perception that other schools in Northwestern are also pursuing scalecraft in line with market logic is an important driver shaping their scalar practices.

The discussion has highlighted how the practice of scalecraft in Northwestern has intersected with market logic. In instances where this has occurred there has been a shift in actors' scalar practices from a focus on the local authority as being the most important scale in which all schools are embedded, to an emphasis on the individual school or academy scale as the primary focus. Local authority officers practiced scalecraft in such a way whereby they did not allow this to disrupt their overarching policy efforts. They did so by re-emphasising the embeddedness of individual academies in the overarching local authority scale. However, when academy principals deployed market logic this served to fragment the scalar project of the Northwestern Model; these actors' scalecraft was shaped by this market logic to a much greater extent and therefore their scalar practices did not link back to the city-wide scalar focus.

Market Logic in Eastshire

Actors in Eastshire made sense of the academies policy by practising scalecraft in such a way that consistently mobilised market logic. When principals and governors described how they came to the decision to convert to academy status they adopted scalar practices which emphasised the individual school scale as being their most significant consideration by creating a boundary between themselves and the local authority or other schools. Financial incentives which became available to schools converting to academy status were a key consideration in the choice over whether to convert to an academy. Academy actors argued that these incentives left them with no choice other than to convert. This was explained by the argument that individual schools were operating in a national ‘marketplace’ where the pursuit of individual interests was the only choice available to actors if they wanted to thrive in this competitive landscape. Despite academy conversion being framed by the national policy narrative as an issue of ‘individual school choice’, academy actors in Eastshire made sense of the policy as involving only one feasible decision – that of conversion. A major driver of this was actors understanding themselves to be operating in a marketplace; the main scalar practices deployed here served to dissolve boundaries between the individual school scale and the national scale. This concept of a national marketplace was mobilised in principals’ and governors’ scalecraft in such a way that encouraged and enabled these actors to consider the individual school scale as their most important priority.

A further illustration of academies feeling governed by the notion of a national marketplace relates to the perception of reputational risk. During the period when Eastshire academies were converting, the state’s policy narrative equated converter academies with the latter being the most prestigious schools in the country. Academy principals and governors once again made sense of their policy decision by considering the interests of their own institution and simultaneously integrating this with the idea that their reputation and institutional ‘brand’ in the marketplace was of key importance. The dominance of this market logic in their scalecraft practices intersected with the perception that converting to academy status was the safest option to ensure the protection of their school’s reputation. Once again, the concept of operating in a market where the pursuit of individual interests is the expected behaviour has been mobilised through the practice of scalecraft whereby principals and governors feel there is no alternative other than to conduct their policy work by considering the scale of their individual institution.

A different issue which demonstrated the intersection of market logic with practices of scalecraft among Eastshire actors relates to the issue of re-structuring education service provision. Local authority officers related this issue to the academies policy by arguing that funds were being re-distributed away from the local authority and given directly to academies, making it essential for the local authority to provide education services according to a market model. Officers described how running education services according to a market model necessarily shifted to a focus on the individual school scale which they expressed several concerns about. The dominance of individual school choice and the pursuit of profit by service suppliers were regarded by officers to be incompatible with an outlook which could plan for the needs of future generations of children. A scalar focus exclusively on individual schools was also seen to carry the risk of not providing services which may only be needed by few children and are therefore not profitable for suppliers. By expressing these concerns about education services being governed by market logic, officers suggested that scalecraft practices which emphasise the individual school scale have side-lined the local authority to an excessive degree. However, the way in which the individual school scale has been crafted in relation to market logic appears to have become normalised in the governance of education in Eastshire. It is therefore unlikely that the concerns of these local authority officers will result in schools shifting their scalecraft practices away from the political ideas of market logic meaning that they will most likely continue to side-line the local authority scale when they make decisions.

An additional issue which highlighted how scalecraft mobilised market logic relates to how academy principals and governors understood the consequences of their decisions on the wider local authority area. Principals and governors made reference to possible disadvantages being created in other schools in the wider local authority as a result of their decision to convert to academy status. However, these actors would deploy scalar practices which consistently shifted the focus away from local authority-wide issues by re-emphasising the scale of their individual institutions. An example of this scalecraft practice was when some actors recognised how, prior to becoming an academy, their school had contributed to subsidising local authority services. The fact that academies no longer do this was side-lined by actors shifting their focus to concentrate on their own individual academy. This framed the needs of academy actors' own institutions as being their sole priority. This,

in turn, intersected with principals and governors drawing on arguments about how essential it was for them to act in their own self-interest due to existing in a competitive market. Scalecraft and market logic are thus intertwined here – placing the greatest emphasis on the individual school scale and the pursuit of individual interests in a market setting both serve to frame this strategy as the only feasible option available to academy actors. What is important to note here is that principals and governors expressed that they felt unable to do otherwise. Despite a number of actors feeling ideologically opposed to the idea of making decisions in a self-interested manner, they ultimately felt that the dominance of market logic in the schooling landscape left them with no alternative but to operate in this way.

The mobilisation of market logic was also characteristic of discussions relating to school-to-school partnerships in Eastshire. Partnerships can be interpreted as a scalar strategy which seeks to strengthen the connections between individual schools across the local authority area. This strategy was pursued partly due to the decreased capacity of the local authority to support schools. It is an attempt by the local authority to encourage schools to mutually support each other by sharing resources and knowledge. While all interviewees valued the idea of school-to-school partnerships, market dynamics were considered a major threat to the achievement of this scalar project. There was a sense that the pressure on actors to focus on the individual school scale (according to the logic of the market) was too great, making subsequent scalecraft practices contribute to the schooling landscape remaining highly fragmented and individualised.

While the academies policy has contributed to an intensification of scalecraft practices which focus on the individual school scale through the provision of education services being dominated by market logic, this is only part of the dynamic in Eastshire. When officers discussed the shift towards the marketisation of education services they also described a tension between the ‘provider-customer’ dynamic and the existence of enduring relationships of trust. For example, officers recounted how they had been faced with a dilemma when a school which had not ‘subscribed’ to their services asked them for advice. Officers demonstrated how they had yet to become exclusively governed by market logic by arguing that their response to these kinds of situations was to continue to try to assist schools even when they may not officially be ‘paying customers’. Officers justified their

decision to do this by arguing that they still had a ‘duty of care’ towards all schools in the local authority area. Thus, this can be understood as a tension between, on the one hand, dominant scalecraft which prioritises the individual school scale and intersects with a market logic of monetised customer-supplier relationships and, on the other hand, a less dominant but enduring scalecraft practice which emphasises the local authority scale as being important to ensuring that all schools in Eastshire receive support when they are in need. The latter behaviour transcends market logic by emphasising the value of non-monetary relations and accepts the idea of engaging in non-profitable activity.

In light of the above, the case of Eastshire demonstrates how the dominant practice of scalecraft has intersected with ideas of market logic which has contributed to policy actors constructing academies overwhelmingly in relation to the individual school scale. There are several dynamics at play here. Actors working in schools perceived themselves as working within a ‘national marketplace’ of schools which subsequently made them feel governed by principles relating to the pursuit of individual interests in their reactions to policy. This sense of working in a national marketplace, in turn, served to undermine any alternative scalecraft attempts to build policy meanings based on a local authority, Eastshire-wide scale. In addition, the material conditions of Eastshire are conducive to the development of a ‘market structure’ of schools due to the physically dispersed nature of the schooling landscape. The latter constitutes a further factor which contributed to the practice of scalecraft intersecting with market logic and emphasising the primacy of the individual school scale in Eastshire.

Scalecraft and Community

This chapter has thus far demonstrated how scalecraft involved the mobilisation of the concepts of the state and market during the implementation of academies in Northwestern and Eastshire. The politics of the state and market reflect existing understandings of the governance dynamics driving policy reforms in England’s education system. However, the state and market only appear to give a partial insight into the politics being mobilised in scalar practices identified in Chapters 5 and 6. The section which follows aims to demonstrate how the additional concept of ‘community’ reflects a further dimension of politics being mobilised in the scalecraft of academies.

Community in Northwestern

The Northwestern Academies Model altered the national policy to frame academies as being part of the vision and needs of the local authority scale. The Model was characterised in Chapter 6 as a ‘scalar project’; scalecraft is being practised in such a way which emphasises the local authority scale as the most important socio-spatial unit. At the foundations of this argument is a scaled construction of community. The Northwestern Model promotes the idea that a collective identity exists in Northwestern, which is delineated by the boundaries of the area served by the local authority. Within this, individual schools and academies are imagined to be embedded within the local authority and the Model normatively states that schools should feel that they both serve and belong to the local authority. This was also underlined by the way in which officers described strategically combining the academies policy with opportunities relating to the *Building Schools for the Future* policy. Officers underlined that this would further their ambition to bring benefits to all schools in Northwestern and to maximise collaboration across the local authority area. This practice of scalecraft heavily focused on bringing benefits to a city-wide community and framed it as the primary reason for engaging with academies.

The centrality of a sense of community in the scalecrafting of the Northwestern Academies Model was also emphasised when local authority officers discussed how the Model was developed in response to fears that the academies policy would result in individual schools benefitting at the expense of others. The latter was regarded by City Council members as incompatible with their political outlook. By developing the variant model of academies, local authority officers were able to employ scalar practices which caused a shift in emphasis from the policy benefitting individual schools to the policy serving the city-wide area of Northwestern. Officers described their role in the implementation of academies as one which reinforced the importance of a Northwestern community above all other scales. They argued that they wanted to be the ‘glue’ which encouraged collaboration across the city area, which would remind academies that they were serving a community that existed beyond their individual catchment areas. By consciously constructing the academies policy to relate to the local authority area these officers can be said to be engaging in the practice of scalecraft where developing a sense of ‘community’ is a key conceptual device in achieving their strategy.

The role of academy sponsors was a key tenet of the Northwestern Model and the way this was framed can also be understood to be driven by a construction of a local authority-wide community. Local authority officers ran the sponsor selection procedure and argued that sponsors demonstrating a commitment to Northwestern was the most critical selection criterion which they valued more than sponsors' financial contributions. Officers also gave preference to sponsor organisations that had a history of working in the Northwestern area because they felt that these organisations had already demonstrated a 'passion' for the city and a 'commitment' to its success. Thus, sponsors possessing a shared sense of community and commitment to the city were considered instrumental in crafting academies in such a way that the local authority scale received greater emphasis over that of the individual school scale in Northwestern.

The notion of a city-wide community was indeed shared by the sponsors and this was conveyed when these actors explained why they chose to become involved in the policy. For example, two businesses initially rejected the idea of becoming a sponsor because they assumed that it would involve individual schools benefitting in isolation from the rest of Northwestern schools. Not only does this mirror the initial reaction to the national academies policy of City Council members but it also suggests that these sponsors share a common idea of how the community is defined by the local authority-wide scale. Sponsors also express a similar argument that individual institutions acting in their own interest is something which would undermine this community. When sponsors were asked about the role of the City Council co-sponsor their responses also closely reflected the community vision being promoted by the Northwestern Model. Sponsors understood the City Council to be linking the individual school scale with that of the local authority, which sponsors considered to be imperative. In light of this, sponsors were also practicing scalecraft in a way that similarly drew on ideas of a community whose meaning was embedded in the local authority scale.

Some academy principals also articulated a dedication to working in such a way that equated the local authority scale with the notion of a Northwestern community. They understood the City Council co-sponsor to be providing them with knowledge about the wider issues and challenges of the city area which, in turn, linked them to the wider scalar project of the

Northwestern Academies Model. One principal clearly conveyed this by describing their academy as being a part of the Northwestern ‘jigsaw’.

The scalecraft practices in Northwestern cannot be disconnected from material conditions and the context of the local authority which also contributed to how policy actors constructed ideas of community. Northwestern is a metropolitan authority which was perceived by policy actors as covering a relatively small geographical area; its urban fabric means that all schools are located within close proximity to each other and to the local authority institution. Local authority officers emphasised how these material conditions contributed to how the academies policy played out and how their scalar project was able to draw on a pre-existing imagination of and support for a city-wide community.

In addition to this, there was a strong history of crafting a sense of community around the local authority scale in Northwestern. Since the late 1980s, the city has experienced regeneration efforts which officers often made reference to when describing the existence of a sense of ‘Northwestern-ness’. This history of emphasising the need for policies to benefit the whole local authority area rather than individual institutions is therefore likely to have been a strong guiding principle behind the Northwestern Academies Model and would have made gathering support for the idea of a ‘city community’ an easier endeavour as this did not represent a new way of understanding Northwestern. A clear example of how these previous scalecraft practices fed into the Northwestern Academies Model is the way in which the City Council had existing strong links with the business organisations which eventually became academy sponsors. Not only did these pre-existing collaborations make it easier for local authority actors to co-opt businesses into the academies scheme but this also meant that businesses were already familiar with practising scalecraft whereby they made sense of their work as a contribution to a local authority-wide community.

While local authority officers and academy sponsors articulated a consistent idea that the local authority scale was of greatest importance and symbolic of a collective Northwestern community, there was some resistance to this amongst principals. Two academy principal interviewees resisted the Northwestern Model’s vision by focusing on the scale of their individual academy rather than that of the local authority. For example, when they discussed the role of the City Council co-sponsor they emphasised the benefits this brought to their

individual academy without emphasising how this, in turn, was related to addressing problems in Northwestern more widely. A similar tension was apparent when principals described some isolated incidents where they disagreed with local authority officers over the degree to which the local authority could or should be involved in the affairs of their academy. For these principals, the academies policy related to the scale of the individual school which they emphasised by constructing a scalar boundary between themselves and the local authority. They conveyed this by harnessing the idea of community to relate to the specific population within their catchment area rather than the entire local authority area. Another indication that not all actors were convinced by the notion of being part of a local authority community was revealed when officers described having to reassure school head teachers that academies did not represent a ‘threat’ to them. These school principals clearly did not regard themselves as being part of a community which both themselves and academies were collectively members of. Thus, voices of resistance were not absent in responses to practices of scalecraft which deployed a construction of community which was tied to the Northwestern local authority scale.

In light of the above, the case of Northwestern reveals how actors practised scalecraft by constructing and mobilising the idea of a community which existed at the local authority scale. While actors’ scalar practices also emphasised the individual school scale, a key accompanying practice was to consistently link the individual school scale to that of the local authority which served to reinforce their overarching scalecraft focus. Deploying the scaled concept of a local authority community was also facilitated and shaped by the material conditions and historical context of Northwestern. Its urban area being perceived as being relatively small and its historical tradition of focusing on regenerating the entire city are factors which have shaped the way in which scalecraft has been practiced. These factors have thus also facilitated efforts by actors to gather support for the implementation of academies in relation to a local authority-wide scale.

Community in Eastshire

By focusing on how actors constructed scale when making sense of the academies policy in Eastshire, analysis revealed that these actors were also practising scalecraft by drawing on the concept of ‘community’. In Eastshire, dominant understandings of community were firmly located at the individual academy scale – within the boundaries of individual

academies and their associated catchment area. Actors demonstrated how they made sense of the academies policy by consistently constructing boundaries between the scale of the local authority and the individual school in their scalar practices. As well as separating these two scales, the dominant practice of scalecraft was to consistently focus on the individual school scale.

Notions of institutional identity and history were central to constructing a sense of community around the individual school scale. This was highlighted by the way in which academies included in the study considered the prospect of changing their institution's name from 'community college' or 'area college' to 'academy' as something that was completely out of the question. Academy principals and governors explained this by arguing that they did not want the local community to think that academy status was undermining the historical identity and founding values of their institution. Indeed, these founding values were based on the idea of a social collective being associated with community colleges and area colleges rather than with Eastshire as a whole. The institutional principles stated that the colleges should be the hub of their community or village and not simply be places where young people received their formal state education. Thus, this existing construction of community which centred around the individual school scale was central to the scalecraft practices of academy actors and shaped their interpretations of what 'academy status' meant to them. Community colleges and area colleges therefore actively sought to build a sense of community which focused on their individual school and its catchment area. Indeed, the academies included in the study never identified themselves as 'Eastshire' institutions and only ever articulated a sense of community that related to their village or catchment area.

Although principals and governors articulated to varying degrees the extent to which they were personally dedicated to the historical identity and principles of their institutions, all of them acknowledged that changing the name of the school to 'academy' would have been deeply unpopular and would have made things very difficult for them at the consultation stage of their transition to academy status. Thus, shaped by this pre-existing sense of community, principals and governors practiced scalecraft by placing greatest consideration on the individual school scale and its unique institutional identity. Emphasis was also predominantly placed on gaining the support of 'local community' stakeholders (who constituted any interested member of the public, not just parents) located within the

academy's catchment area. Thus, the scale of the individual school was a consistent focus of actors' scalecraft practices; scalecraft is wrapped up in meanings of a sense of community which is also nested within this scale. In addition, academy principals and governors often made claims about the unique nature of the community surrounding their institution, something which further underlined how their scalecraft practices focused on this scaled deployment of community.

When discussing how Eastshire schools were given a choice to convert to academy status, local authority officers emphasised that the decision was firmly located in the scalar domain of the individual school. This further emphasised how the academies policy was made sense of in Eastshire through scalar practices which created a boundary between the local authority and individual school scales, with the greatest agency being given to individual schools. In the case of local authority officers the latter was also often framed in relation to the concept of community. Officers argued that academy conversion was a decision to be made by schools and their communities, something which constructed the idea of cohesive social collectives existing around individual schools; this silenced the possibility of a community existing at the local authority scale. In addition to this, officers mobilised the concept of community when they discussed the role of the local authority in relation to academies. Part of this role was described as being able to understand the historical and educational context of the individual community linked to an academy. This argument further emphasises a lack of an Eastshire-wide sense of social collectivity and also how scalecraft operated through scalar practices constructing a boundary between the local authority and individual school scales.

As was argued in the case of Northwestern, understanding how scalecraft practices reflected the mobilisation of the concept of community cannot be separated from the material conditions of Eastshire. Eastshire is a large Shire County which consists of some small urban settlements and has a rural landscape with villages and towns that actors regarded as being physically separate from each other. Therefore, the way in which a sense of 'Eastshire community' is largely absent intersects with these perceived material conditions of dispersed and diverse settlements and landscapes. The practice of scalecraft can consequently be understood as being shaped by scaled meanings of community which are linked to the physical landscape of Eastshire.

While the dominant way actors made sense of academies in Eastshire involved deploying the concept of community and relating this to the individual school scale, there were some instances when local authority officers adopted alternative kinds of scalar practices which attempted to resist this dominant mode of scalecraft. Officers at times described how individual schools were interconnected with the wider scale of Eastshire and therefore attempted to re-emphasise the importance of the local authority scale. For example, officers stated that they could offer valuable knowledge relating to Eastshire as a whole which they argued individual academies did not have the capacity or ability to make sense of themselves. In addition to this, officers attempted to construct links between the local authority and individual school scales by emphasising the physical proximity of the local authority institution to all Eastshire schools. Here, officers stressed the importance of being able to visit schools in a short space of time or at short notice – a consideration which suggests that one aspect of officers’ scalecraft practices was to understand schools belonging to a community spanning the local authority area.

Officers in Eastshire also adopted practices which emphasised a shared sense of community existing between the local authority and individual schools when they articulated a reluctance to move to a completely market-based model. The shift towards the marketisation of education services was described by officers as being in tension with an older type of connection between the local authority and individual schools which was based on personal relationships and trust. The latter can be interpreted as an enduring practice which mobilises a sense of community existing between the local authority and schools and this is something officers have attempted to conserve. Officers stressed the importance of not making academies pay for seeking informal local authority advice and how they have provided free ‘keeping in touch’ visits to academies. This emphasises how officers practiced scalecraft by mobilising the concept of community and arguing that the local authority and individual schools shared a relationship which went beyond a consumer-provider model.

Importantly, academy principals and governors did not depart from their dominant practice of scalecraft in this way. These actors did not adopt scalar practices which conveyed being

nested within the wider local authority scale nor did they demonstrate that they felt part of a local authority-wide community.

To summarise, local authority officers, academy principals and academy governors in Eastshire overwhelmingly made sense of the academies policy by adopting scalar practices which placed emphasis on the individual school scale. The latter scale was crafted in such a way that made it clear how scalecraft was linked to the idea that individual schools and their catchment areas represented distinct communities. Scalecraft can be understood to be shaped and facilitated by a strong historical sense of identity which existed in schools. This emphasis on schools and their surrounding catchment area or village as being unique was a community identity which would have made it difficult to frame community in relation to the local authority scale. Scalecraft practices which related the academies policy as an issue primarily relevant to individual school communities would have also gained easier support in light of the pre-existing sense of institutional identity. Although local authority officers also attempted to emphasise the local authority scale, the dominant practices of scalecraft have resulted in an absence of an ‘Eastshire community’ in understandings of the academies policy.

Discussion

This chapter has introduced and developed the theoretical framework of scalecraft by empirically illustrating how actors’ scalar practices have been underpinned by a distinct type of politics. The concept of scalecraft developed here is different to the way the term has been used in existing human geography literature. As mentioned previously, the term ‘scalecraft’ has been coined by Fraser (2010). Fraser uses the term to refer to ‘the craft of scalar practices’ – an idea which calls for attention to be placed on the “aptitude, skill, and experience embedded within” (*ibid*, p.333) these practices. Scalecraft stems from the terminology of ‘statecraft’, with the latter referring to how governments and political elites focus on the art of governing and practical considerations such as winning elections rather than strictly being guided by ideological principles. The word ‘craft’ inevitably focuses our analytical lens on the skills, tactics, negotiations and any other practices actors enact during their political and policy work. For example, Fraser describes how scale is fashioned and refashioned to suit particular needs and how scalecraft can involve “recast[ing] social

conditions at particular geographical scales towards achieving a particular aim” (*ibid*, p.344). However, unlike statecraft, scalecraft does not exclusively focus on governments or political elites but instead acknowledges that any actor can be involved in this ‘craft work’.

The general characteristics of Fraser’s scalecraft concept that have been described thus far are regarded as highly relevant to the focus of this thesis. However, there are several aspects of Fraser’s approach to ‘scalecraft’ which are either incompatible or unrelated to the research approach adopted here. The first of these issues is that Fraser does not make an ontological distinction between the political-economic and post-structural approaches to scale. For example, he refers to scalecraft in relation to political-economic notions such as ‘scale jumping’ as well as borrowing arguments from post-structuralist critics such as Moore (2008). This thesis has developed the idea of ‘scalecraft’ on the ontological foundations of post-structuralist approaches to scale and reflects the associated critiques which have been made of political-economic approaches.

Secondly, Fraser examines practices of scalecraft primarily to understand the ‘effectiveness’ of scalar practices and why some strategies ‘fail’ and others ‘succeed’. While my own research focus has allowed room for policy actors’ perceptions of the ‘effectiveness’ of their scalecraft practices, it would consider this in the context of the multitude of actors’ scalar constructions rather than perceptions of effectiveness being the main focus. In addition, the idea of clear-cut ‘failed’ or ‘successful’ scalar projects appear incompatible with post-structuralist arguments about scalar constructs being inherently fluid and in a constant state of emergence.

Thirdly, Fraser’s article concludes by arguing that the politics embedded in scalecraft practices is “expansive and exciting” (*ibid*, p.344) and leaves the further development of this idea to be advanced by future research. The concept of scalecraft employed here has continued from where Fraser concluded and endeavours to understand not only what kinds of scalar practices actors deploy but also what kind of politics these practices imply.

In light of the above, this chapter has presented a different concept of scalecraft to that which exists in the human geography literature. By conceptualising the policy work of actors implementing academies as the practice of scalecraft this chapter has highlighted several

issues. Firstly, scalecraft has provided a window into the dynamics governing England's schooling system by identifying how actors mobilise the concepts of the state, market and community. The discussion has underlined how these three concepts assume a central role when actors interpret and strategically shape meanings of the academies policy. By adopting a scalar lens to examine the process through which actors have understood academies, the empirical findings have illustrated how the policy has challenged and disturbed meanings which actors attach to the state, market and community. The concept of scalecraft has allowed for an investigation into how actors muddle through and strategically construct the meanings of these political concepts and how this is done through the consistent deployment of scalar practices.

The discussion has also highlighted how the academies policy makes direct, normative arguments about how the scalar hierarchy ought to be ordered. Developing the concept of scalecraft has revealed not only how actors deploy scalar practices as a way of making sense of policy but it also goes a step further to reveal that this process involves the mobilisation of political arguments. In the case of the academies policy it has involved negotiating how the state, market and community fit into the context of re-organising the scalar realms of education. Furthermore, the way in which the 'guiding scales' used by policy actors – individual school, local authority and national – have been constructed and interpreted in highly contextualised ways serves to underline the importance of problematising the concept of 'scale'. The critical approach to scale adopted here has underlined how the meanings of scalar categories should not be taken for granted and that a close interrogation of these has scope to reveal much about the nature of policy practices.

What these insights also expose is that the practice of scalecraft involves a dual dynamic. Scalar practices *shape* the meanings of political arguments – in this case those relating to the state, market and community – and scalar practices are also *guided* by pre-existing understandings and normative arguments about what the political landscape ought to look like. Overall, the case of Northwestern demonstrates a politics which emphasises a conviction that state governing strategies can be modified to the advantage of Northwestern, arguments about the logic of the market being present but not prevalent, and a sense of community that spans the entire local authority scale. In Eastshire, the overarching politics has emphasised a perceived need to conform to the state's governing

incentives and pressures, a sense of being governed by powerful market logic, and the meaning of community being linked to the individual school scale. While there are exceptions within these broad characterisations, the dominant scalecraft of each case has been shown to be embedded within the described political positions.

The practice of scalecraft has been shown to both restrict and enable the actions of policy actors. For example, in Northwestern, interpretations of state strategies exerting indirect governing pressures were typically expressed as giving officers the flexibility to pursue the scalar project of the Northwestern Academies Model. In the case of Eastshire, a distant state governor was instead characterised as restricting actors' choice to exclusively consider academies in relation to the individual school scale. Descriptions of being subject to 'top-down' state directives by actors in both cases were associated with having their policy choices confined. The role of market logic in Northwestern emphasised individual school choice and therefore could have had a potentially disruptive effect on the dominant scalecraft practices which emphasised the importance of the local authority scale. In Eastshire, market logic intersected with scalar practices emphasising the individual school scale which supported the overarching scalecraft strategy. The concept of a local authority-wide community was mobilised in Northwestern in such a way that supported the overarching scalar project of framing the academies policy in relation to the local authority scale. Similarly, the way in which a sense of community was attached to the individual school scale in Eastshire served to enable actors to pursue scalecraft which constructed the academies policy primarily as an issue for individual schools.

This chapter has described how the state, market and community have been mobilised in the practice of scalecraft by discussing these concepts separately. It is important to note however that actors draw on these concepts in a complex, hybrid manner. For example, constructions of community and market have combined in the scalecraft practices of Eastshire. Community being associated with the individual school scale and this scale also being emphasised by focusing on the pursuit of individual interests according to market logic have combined to mutually emphasise a common scalecraft strategy. Meanings related to community and the state were combined in Northwestern when officers integrated their understandings of a strong, local authority-wide community with a dismissive attitude towards the state; this bolstered their dominant scalecraft practice. Constructions of the

state and market were combined in Eastshire when policy actors understood the state to be governing indirectly by setting up incentives which, in turn, were operationalised in the schooling marketplace. The effect of mobilising the concepts of the state and market here was to situate policy at the individual school scale.

The discussion has also illuminated the importance of considering the practices of scalecraft in relation to materiality and physical distance. Constructing and emphasising the importance of one scale over another has intersected with actors' perceptions of the material conditions of their policy contexts. In the case of Northwestern where scalecraft has overwhelmingly focused on the significance of the local authority scale, this strategy closely reflects how actors perceive Northwestern to cover a small, easily accessible urban area. The latter is compatible with how scalecraft mobilised the idea that policy should be understood in terms of a Northwestern-wide community. Actors in Eastshire characterise the local authority area as sprawling and disparate. These perceptions of the material conditions of Eastshire are also compatible with actors' dominant scalecraft practices; a dispersed landscape of schools is conducive to the idea of the individual school being the most important scale to consider. Thus, scalecraft not only intersects with the mobilisation of political concepts but must also be considered in light of the material conditions actors perceive themselves to be operating within. These arguments do not suggest reifying space or treating it as having an objective existence; instead, the emphasis is on actors' *perceptions* of their material surroundings and how these perceptions become integrated within their scalar practices.

CHAPTER 8

Conclusion

This thesis began with the observation that the study of policy appears to be inextricably linked to arguments about scale. Scholars have sought to understand policy by making assumptions about how the political world is comprised of a vertical hierarchy of scales. Classic approaches to the study of implementation have been a key resource in highlighting how policy has been studied by analysing its position and movements along a hierarchy of scales. Arguments about scale, however, have been expressed implicitly which has led to scales becoming an assumed feature of the political world. Although many aspects of traditional implementation and policy studies have been recently subject to critique, particularly by interpretive approaches, the concept of scale remains largely unscrutinised. Insights from the discipline of human geography have been utilised by this thesis as a theoretical tool which has exposed the uncritical way in which scalar ideas feature in the study of policy. Moreover, human geographers' conceptualisation of scale as a category of practice has been deemed particularly significant. In this approach scale is understood to not have an ontological existence, and emphasis is instead placed on *scalar practices* which reflect how actors use categories of scale to interpret and strategically construct their social worlds. These arguments led to the development of an intellectual puzzle which reflected on the potential importance of furthering the insights of interpretive approaches to policy by integrating them with a critical approach to scale. The result was the thesis exploring this puzzle through posing the following overarching research question:

*What kinds of scalar practices do actors deploy during their policy work,
and what kinds of politics do these practices comprise?*

This question closely reflects the important distinction made by Adam Moore (2008: 212) who argues that “the tendency to partition the social world into hierarchically ordered spatial ‘containers’ is what we want to explain – not explain things with”. The thesis has engaged with Moore’s argument by explaining how this tendency to partition the world

according to scale reflects how actors articulate their work in a way that mirrors dominant practices of representation which are prevalent in society. In other words, categories of scale are key epistemological building blocks available to actors as they seek to make sense of and convey their policy worlds. In addition, the thesis has also revealed how the tendency to partition the social world into scales can be understood to be a key strategic practice which actors use when they attempt to craft policy in a particular manner. By adopting an interpretive approach to policy this thesis suggests that perhaps a more important focus of analysis is to emphasise understanding *interpretations* of scale rather than exclusively being preoccupied with Moore's argument that research should find 'explanations' for why scale is used as a category of practice. The interpretive lens adopted here has resulted in a fine-grained analysis of the process through which scalar practices operate when policy actors make sense of, interpret and strategically represent their work. Importantly, an interpretive approach has also allowed for the identification of the diverse kinds of politics which have been mobilised in actors' scalar practices which has, in turn, resulted in the development of the theoretical concept of scalecraft.

The Introduction highlighted how education is a policy arena where scalar practices sharply come into focus. Education has been labelled in relation to a range of scalar categories including those of the state and Europe as well as scales 'within' perceived national borders such as local authorities or a school's catchment area. The thesis identified England's academies policy as being underpinned by distinctly scalar claims. Chapter 2 outlined how the official policy narrative of academies is that when a school converts to academy status it becomes 'free' from local authority control, directly accountable to the state and has greater levels of individual autonomy. Thus, the policy is inherently about the reorganisation of relationships and responsibilities between the scales of the individual school, local authority and the state. In light of this, the academies policy was considered an ideal focus for an empirical investigation into how actors make sense of a policy's scalar claims and what kinds of scalar practices they deploy when they engage with policy. A focus on academies also allowed for this thesis to make an important empirical contribution. There is very little empirical work which adopts an interpretive approach to understanding how actors make sense of academies during their policy work and this thesis represents one of the first attempts to analyse the policy in this way. The importance of the thesis' empirical contribution is underlined further when one considers the controversy and debate that has

surrounded academies over the past decade. Exploring the scalar practices of local authority officers and actors working in academies has been a novel way of examining how the policy has been interpreted and strategically constructed. This has also exposed the kinds of politics which have been mobilised in the process of actors' policy work.

This concluding chapter outlines the empirical and theoretical contributions the thesis has developed through the pursuit of the research puzzle. Firstly, the discussion highlights what has been revealed about the academies policy. Secondly, it outlines the contributions the thesis has made to existing bodies of literature. Thirdly, the concept of 'scalecraft' is presented as a new theoretical approach which can facilitate the study of scale and policy. Finally, the chapter ends by discussing possibilities for future avenues of research that can build on the contributions of this thesis.

Understanding the Academies Policy Through Scalecraft

The early chapters of the thesis focused on describing the underlying dynamics governing the academies policy (Chapter 2), setting out the theoretical framework (Chapter 3), and outlining the methodological approach, data generation and process of analysis (Chapter 4). Chapters 5 and 6 presented the empirical findings generated from the interview data. A number of key insights have been developed about academies by scrutinising the scalar practices adopted by policy actors included in the research.

The thesis has revealed how the scalar practices of policy actors engaging with academies mirrored the scalar focus of the national policy narrative. Namely, actors related academies to three scales: individual schools, local authorities and the national scale. Chapters 5 and 6 combined an interpretive approach to policy and a critical approach to scale as a way of problematising these scalar categories. The empirical chapters approached scale as a category of practice and illustrated how scales are represented and strategically constructed by actors to create particular policy meanings around academies. In Northwestern, scalar practices were deployed to construct academies in relation to the local authority scale which individual academies were nested within. These practices were accompanied by a construction of the national scale as being the source of opportunities which can be used to advance the interests of Northwestern. Dominant scalar practices in Eastshire constructed

academies in such a way that related the policy to the individual school scale, largely to the exclusion of the local authority. These practices conformed to the national policy narrative, and the national scale was largely regarded as something to be reacted to rather than to be negotiated with or resisted.

Exploring the case studies with a focus on scalar practices has served to underline how the academies policy has forced actors to confront fundamental questions about how relationships and responsibilities relating to the governance of schooling should be ordered. When engaging with academies, actors have associated their work with addressing questions about individual school autonomy, the role of local authorities and the power of the state.⁴ The project's case study design has highlighted that although these normative questions relate to three categories of scale, the meanings of these scales and what they represent are crafted and negotiated by actors working in local authorities and schools in diverse ways which reflect their situated contexts.

A further key empirical insight developed in Chapter 7 has been to highlight that academies involve the intersecting political concepts of the state, market and community. Chapter 2 indicated how the dynamics governing England's education have been understood in the literature as relating to the advance of market logic and centralised pressure from the state. The empirical findings of the thesis have illustrated how these governing dynamics have indeed been reflected in the way policy actors have made sense of academies. The state's governing pressures were interlinked with the way in which actors understood the academies policy; risks and incentives for setting up academies, scrutiny from national agencies, and state directives were all key perceptions of the state which, in turn, shaped the way policy actors engaged with academies. Academies were also consistently related to the logic of the market with issues such as competition, the 'marketplace' of schools, and provider-customer relationships being commonly associated with the policy. However, in order to gain a more complete understanding of actors' interpretations of academies in their engagement with the policy, the concept of 'community' was developed as an additional

⁴ It is important to note that these arguments have already been made in an existing body of work in the field of education policy, where authors have examined how schools negotiate pressures relating to the restructuring of education (see, for example, Bowe *et al.* (1992), Gewirtz (2001) and Ball *et al.* (2012)). However, this work has not been specifically related to the academies policy.

dynamic that underpinned actors' scalar practices. This concept of community was instrumental in conveying how dominant practices of scalecraft were reflected in how actors associated a social collective or sense of cohesion with a particular scale.

The empirical findings not only illustrate how actors mobilised the political concepts of the state, market and community during their policy work but they also highlighted how this intersected with scalecraft to construct multiple meanings of academies. Underlining the multiple meanings and politics of academies may seem an obvious point to scholars who are well-versed in the fundamentals of interpretivism. For interpretivists, policy will always have multiple and malleable meanings. However, considering that the academies policy continues to be the centre of political and media attention in England's policy debates, this empirical observation regarding the multiple meanings of academies remains an important one. The thesis thus calls for academies to continue to be understood in relation to the commonly cited advance of the market and centralising governing pressures from the state; however, it also argues that academies need to be considered in relation to the mobilisation of particular constructions of community. Doing this will necessitate privileging the perspectives of actors working in local authorities and academies to discern how their work has both shaped and been shaped by the underlying politics mobilised by the policy.

Theoretical Critiques and Contributions

Beyond its empirical insights relating to the academies policy and the governance of education, the thesis makes a number of contributions and critiques to three bodies of literature. The first of these literatures is that of traditional implementation studies. This literature was reviewed in Chapter 3 and represented a key resource in highlighting an (albeit implied) interest in scale in studies of policy. This thesis serves to further problematise the approaches implementation studies have taken when they seek to understand policy, such as their notions of 'top-down' or 'bottom-up' processes. Whilst implementation studies no longer occupy the centre stage of political science and public administration disciplines, their underlying conceptualisations of a vertically scaled hierarchy of policy continue to be reproduced. The thesis has revealed how this approach reifies scale and how the process of uncritically imposing scalar scaffolding on the political world we seek to understand severely limits our capacity to explore the practices of policy. What has

also been confirmed is that studies of how policy is ‘implemented’ have lost sight of the distinction articulated by Moore (2008), namely, that there is a need to understand scale as a ‘category of practice’ used by actors to describe their social worlds rather than using scale as a ‘category of analysis’ whereby scale is given ontological status by social scientists using it as a concept to explain the world with.

The second disciplinary approach this thesis has contributed to is that of interpretive approaches to policy. Chapter 3 highlighted the critiques of traditional implementation studies that have been made by scholars associated with IPA. Examples of how IPA has undermined the positivist assumptions made in classic implementation approaches includes shifting away from a focus on explaining the ‘gap’ between policy goals and outcomes, and rejecting the separation between formulation and implementation (Pülzl and Treib 2007). The concept of scalecraft developed in this thesis has served to support interpretive critiques of classical implementation studies and highlights the value of focusing on situated representations and meanings of policy.

However, this thesis has also underlined how scholars have yet to extend the interpretive critique to include an exploration of scalar practices. Scale has been revealed to be an absolutely critical concept to understanding how actors make sense of their own work and strategically construct policy. This thesis therefore argues that if IPA is to continue to forge new insights by privileging the perceptions and experiences of policy actors, it needs to engage with the process through which scale operates as a category of practice. The notion of scalar practices used in this thesis has stemmed from understandings of practice in human geography. The latter includes representation as a key part of practice, something which has been argued is integral to understandings of policy practices. The empirical data generated from interviewing policy actors has illustrated that mobilising (and suppressing) particular meanings, and mulling over and reflecting on issues are all instrumental to what policy actors *do* and therefore can be considered essential elements of practice. Furthermore, by developing the concept of scalecraft this thesis has underlined how combining an interpretive lens with approaching scale as a category of practice holds great potential for revealing the plethora of meanings that are attached to scalar categories, and also gives rise to the possibility to expose the politics which are implicitly articulated in actors’ policy work.

Although this thesis has primarily associated itself with interpretive approaches to policy, it also makes a contribution to human geography. Chapter 3 alluded to what some authors have called the ‘missing policy agenda’, which refers to a lack of engagement with the study of policy in the human geography discipline (Dorling and Shaw 2002; Martin 2001). This thesis has demonstrated how critical approaches to scale developed in human geography have been incorporated into the study of policy and have created the new theoretical concept of scalecraft. The concept of scalecraft developed in this thesis is proposed to be one platform which human geographers can use as a way of deepening their engagement with studies of policy in order to address this missing disciplinary agenda.

Not only have post-structuralist geographers’ arguments about treating scale as a category of practice exposed how scalar practices are instrumental to the work of policy but their arguments have also served to expose the underlying *politics* which accompany these scalar practices. The latter insight regarding how politics and scalar practices are interwoven has been acknowledged by some geographers as a potentially interesting path of inquiry (see, for example, Fraser 2010). However, the issue has remained empirically and theoretically underdeveloped. Thus, this thesis provides both empirical evidence and a theoretical framework to support future research which may explore the relationship between scalar practices and politics.

Scalecraft: A New Approach to Policy and Scale

The theoretical contribution of this thesis has been to develop the concept of scalecraft. Scalecraft has been discussed in Chapter 7 as a concept which reveals what kinds of politics intersect with the scalar practices deployed by policy actors. The concept of scalecraft encompasses the theoretical coupling of an interpretive approach to policy with post-structuralist geographers’ critical approach to scale. Policy and scalar practices are inextricably combined in scalecraft. Interpreting the work of policy actors provides a window into the role scale plays in shaping their social worlds and how scalar categories are used to convey meaning. Similarly, approaching scale as a category of practice leads to an analytical focus where the representation and mobilisation of scalar categories in policy actors’ work can be critically interrogated.

The practice of scalecraft involves two mutually shaping dynamics. Scalar practices and political concepts are mobilised by actors in such a way that reflects existing conceptual, political and contextual structures. In other words, scalar practices will conform to established ways of looking at and representing the political world as something which is ordered according to a hierarchy of scales. Similarly, political concepts will be deployed within an interpretive framework which delineates particular understandings of these concepts. On the other hand, scalecraft also involves the strategic construction of scalar practices and politics. Scalar practices reflect actors shaping the meaning of policy in relation to a particular scale as a way of achieving their own strategic aims. Actors also mobilise particular kinds of politics to advance (or suppress) certain political agendas in their work. Scalecraft therefore encompasses how actors deploy scalar practices and politics which operate within established ways of interpreting the social world and also reflects the techniques and strategies of policy work. The theoretical approach to this dual dynamic has aligned itself with arguments made by authors such as Wagenaar and Cook (2003) and Moore (2008). These authors argue that the purpose of understanding social practices is not to distinguish between each dynamic and they instead maintain that these boundaries are necessarily dissolved in research which immerses itself in the processes by which actors interpret their social worlds.

A key feature of scalecraft is the deployment of concepts to reflect a particular kind of politics. The empirical findings of this thesis revealed these concepts to be the state, market and community. However, different kinds of politics would have been mobilised if a different policy and context had been explored. This is because scalecraft is practiced in close dialogue with a policy's scalar claims. Scalecraft is also interwoven with the wider governing dynamics a policy is associated with. Indeed, this iterative relationship between policy, the nature of political concepts and crafting of scale is what can make scalecraft such a powerful practice for actors to deploy; strategically constructing scales and positioning policy in relation to these can promote particular politics and suppress others, yet scale, policy and politics all need to be closely interlinked for scalecraft to be possible.

A key strength of the scalecraft concept is that it can be used as an alternative framework to expose the politics which underpins the work actors do when they engage with policy.

Chapters 5 and 6 revealed what kinds of scalar practices actors deployed during their work; the main insights developed from this was to reveal how policy was being understood in relation to particular constructions of scale. The political concepts interlinked with these scalar practices only became apparent by developing the concept of scalecraft, which guided analysis to consider the implications of actors' scalar practices.

This thesis has identified four key scalar practices integrated in the techniques of scalecraft. The first of these scalar practices is the *construction of scalar boundaries*. This scalar practice involves representing two scales as being separate and distant from each other. Indeed, the practice can also involve constructing boundaries within a particular construction of scale, such as between individual schools. Deploying scalar practices which emphasise scalar boundaries is a way in which actors can mobilise ideas relating to the pursuit of policy goals in an individualistic or self-interested manner. This is because the creation of scalar boundaries can enable actors to prioritise their interests by excluding other considerations through labelling the latter as being distant, irrelevant or outside their scalar domain.

The second scalar practice which has been identified is the practice of *dissolving scalar boundaries*. In this process two scales are regarded as being nested within each other, making it impossible to establish a clear distinction between them. Dissolving the boundaries between scales serves to undermine possible practices which classify issues as belonging to a different scale; instead, more issues are regarded as relevant considerations due to scales being understood to be inextricably linked.

A third scalar practice involved in scalecraft is the practice of *shifting between scales*. This involves instances where an issue that has been linked to a particular scale is then re-represented as relating to a different scale. Scalar shifts can be particularly important for revealing scalecraft strategies; actors will tend to shift back to the scalar focus which will allow them to construct policy in line with their preferred political position. From this description it could appear that shifting scales is a similar concept to 'scale jumping' from the political-economic geography literature. However, by describing how actors relocate themselves ('jump') between different scales, scale jumping separates scales from social practices and presents scales as discrete and hierarchical orderings of space. The practice of shifting between scales developed here differs to scale jumping in that scale is approached

as a category of practice; descriptions of shifts between scales are firmly grounded in the accounts of policy actors and the situated meanings they assign to scale.

Emphasising the *interconnected nature of scale* is the fourth kind of scalar practice which intersects with scalecraft. This involves representing scales as sharing connections and being interdependent while at the same time remaining separate and distinct from each other (hence being distinguishable from the practice of dissolving scalar boundaries). Constructing scales as being interconnected can expose the relationships and dependencies that policy actors perceive to be important and these will, in turn, be key considerations regarding how actors go about making decisions and conducting negotiations in their work.

These four techniques of scalar practice have a profound effect on the nature of scalecraft. The mobilisation of particular kinds of politics needs to intersect with a complementary scalar practice. To give an illustrative example, scalecraft which involves the mobilisation of a sense of community existing at the local authority scale will need to be supported by scalar practices which dissolve the boundaries between individual schools and the local authority.

Scalecraft practices also serve to expose how actors are both enabled and restricted in how they go about conducting their policy work. Actors practice scalecraft to pursue particular strategic directions and for this to happen the scalar practices and politics contained within scalecraft need to be compatible with actors' particular policy visions. Thus, when scalar practices, policy and politics intersect through scalecraft they can have a mutually supportive relationship which, in turn, enables actors to pursue their chosen type of policy work. However, scalecraft practices can often contain contradictory dynamics; actors may wish to relate the policy to a particular scale but this practice may be undermined by or in tension with a particular kind of politics which emphasises a different scalar construct. Scalecraft can therefore also provide a window into what kinds of dynamics are enabling and restricting actors in the way they go about conducting their policy work.

The thesis has also developed the concept of scalecraft in such a way that draws attention to the importance of perceptions of materiality and physical geography. The empirical findings illustrated how dominant scalecraft practices intersected with perceptions of the geographical environment. If scalar constructs are perceived to occupy the same physical

location then they are likely to be considered interconnected with each other. Perceptions of scales being physically disparate are likely to intersect with scalecraft emphasising scalar boundaries and disconnect. The mobilisation of political concepts is also interconnected with perceptions of physical geography. In the case of the academies policy, perceptions of materiality were especially important to crafting community in relation to a particular scale, with physically proximate and distant scales being respectively associated with a strong and absent sense of community.

While it is important to identify the dominant scalecraft practices which give meaning to policy, there will always be multiple, sometimes competing, practices of scalecraft seeking to shape policy. Thus, scalecraft which is most influential represents a temporary articulation of politics; it may eventually be modified by alternative practices of scalecraft which mobilise different kinds of politics through strategically relating policy to different constructions of scale. Alternatively, for dominant scalecraft to retain its prime position in shaping the meaning of policy, actors will need to be constantly aware of the nature of competing practices to ensure that these continue to be suppressed.

The epistemological approach required in order to research the practice of scalecraft is to understand scale as an epistemological concept rather than an ontological one (Jones 1998). This distinction is what makes scalecraft a theoretical approach that draws on post-structuralist rather than political-economic geographers' conceptualisation of scale. Practicing this epistemology during analysis is no easy task; we live in a world where categories of scale are constantly used in everyday language and a vertical scaffolding of scale is one of the dominant ideas that we are taught should structure our thoughts. On the one hand this represents a typical epistemological challenge of any interpretivist research – privileging the interpretations of actors requires the researcher to analyse empirical data reflexively to try and avoid imposing their own pre-conceptions on the data. However, I would argue that investigating scalecraft practices involves a further challenge of having to re-conceptualise the ontological status of a concept that is deeply engrained in both our everyday and scholarly language.

Using the idea of scalecraft to interpret policy work also requires understanding what kinds of *politics* are caught up in scalar practices identified in the analysis. A key resource for the

researcher in facilitating this process is existing literature which highlights the dominant dynamics which are governing a particular policy arena. It is likely that some of these dynamics will be intersecting with scalar practices of policy actors, however this will not necessarily be the case or may not fully capture the nuanced nature of scalecraft practices. Developing an understanding of the remaining political concepts requires the analyst to consider empirical data and theoretical concepts in an iterative manner in order to eventually describe scalecraft practices which closely reflect actors' interpretations of their social worlds.

An Agenda for Further Research

This thesis has demonstrated how scalar practices are integral to the way actors understand and strategically conduct their policy work. These insights have been developed by drawing on two literatures: interpretive approaches to policy and post-structuralist human geography's engagement with scale. The theoretical framework used to guide this thesis is of an original nature, something which reflects how these two literatures have largely operated in their disciplinary silos. While this thesis has supported existing appraisals of how interpretive approaches to policy and human geography have made highly significant and innovative contributions to understandings of policy and scale respectively, what has been uniquely exposed here is the great potential that lies in the two operating together.

In light of this, the thesis concludes with a call for greater disciplinary dialogue amongst researchers approaching policy interpretively and human geographers critically engaging with scale. This will require an effort involving researchers from both disciplines. Those with an interest in interpretively studying policy will need to take seriously a critical approach to scale as a way in which they can further interrogate the meaning-making processes and strategies involved in policy practices. On the other hand, human geographers will need to recognise the realm of policy as being an important and valuable focus through which they can interrogate the dynamic ways that scalar practices play out in the political world.

While the thesis has utilised an interdisciplinary theoretical approach, its empirical and theoretical contributions have been primarily related to approaches encompassed in IPA.

IPA's call to understand policy from the perspectives of those who engage with it has resulted in cultivating and enriching understandings of how actors go about doing their policy work. If interpretive approaches to policy wish to add further nuance to understandings of policy I have argued that there would be great value in engaging with the scalar practices actors adopt during their everyday policy work and the politics caught up in these practices. While scalar practices are just one representation of the incredibly complex world of policy practices, this thesis has demonstrated the merits of critically engaging with this perspective. The new theoretical concept of scalecraft has been developed as a suggested framework through which to continue this avenue of inquiry in future research.

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Appendix 1

The hard copy of the thesis contains a copy of the article I wrote for the *European Educational Research Journal*. Symposium Journals granted permission for me to publish the article as a hard copy but not in electronic form. The full reference for the article is: Papanastasiou, N. (2013) 'Commercial Actors and the Governing of Education: the case of academy school sponsors in England', *European Educational Research Journal* 12(4): 447–462.

Appendix 2: Sample e-mail to local authority officer in Northwestern

Dear xxxx [name],

I am an ESRC-funded PhD student at the University of Edinburgh and my research project seeks to explore local authority and school experiences of the academies policy. The project does not seek to evaluate in any way, it is instead about understanding the relationships and changes associated with academies and peoples' experiences of these.

I am using Northwestern City Council as one of my case studies and have been particularly interested to learn about the Northwestern Academies Model. Your insights from your past experiences as xxxx [job description] would really be invaluable for my research and I am therefore contacting you to ask whether you would possibly consider participating in a 1-hour research interview with me? The interview could be held any time before xxxx [month] at a date, time and location that would be most convenient for you. If a date before xxxx [month] would not suit you then sometime after that would also be fine.

I have attached an interview information sheet and my CV to this e-mail for your information; if you would like me to clarify any of this (via e-mail or over the phone) I would only be happy to do so.

I appreciate this must be a very busy time for you and your colleagues, but if you could find the time to let me know whether you would be willing to support my project I would be very grateful indeed.

Thank you for your time and I look forward to hearing from you at your convenience.

Yours sincerely,

Natalie Papanastasiou
PhD researcher, Social Policy
School of Social and Political Science
University of Edinburgh

Telephone: [provided in original]

Appendix 3: Information sheet sent to interview participants

Interview participant information sheet

Title of the research project: ‘The manifestation of policy in the multiple spaces of governance: England’s academy schools.’

Contact details

E-mail: N.Papanastasiou@sms.ed.ac.uk

Telephone: [provided in original]

What are the project aims?

- to understand how the academies policy is interpreted and experienced by people at the level of local authorities and schools;
- to explore the incentives behind academy conversion, the roles played by different people in this process and the possible changes experienced after conversion;
- to reveal how national policies are experienced and manifested at local levels of governance.

Why have you been asked for an interview?

You have been identified as a key individual who can provide me with valuable insights for my research.

What will the format of the interview be?

You will be asked guiding questions however you will have the freedom to discuss issues of your choice if you feel that they are relevant to the research. Interviews will be held on a one-to-one basis and it will be strongly preferred that interviews are conducted in person as opposed to over the telephone and digitally recorded if at all possible.

How long will the interview take?

Interviews will aim to be approximately 1 hour long.

Will the data be anonymised?

Yes. The purpose of the project is not to *evaluate* in any way, it is instead about *understanding* local experiences of academies. However, all responses will be anonymised to ensure a high degree of individual anonymity. All data will be stored in a password-secured computer. A copy of the interview transcript will be sent to interviewees who would like to check this for accuracy and anonymity.

How will the interview data be used?

After being transcribed, interviews will be thematically coded and analysed using qualitative methods as part of a process that includes all interviews gathered from local authority and school levels.

Who is funding the research?

The research is being funded by the publicly-funded Economic and Social Research Council.

Who is overseeing the research?

My academic supervisors are Dr. Richard Freeman and Dr. Sotiria Grek. Dr. Freeman is a Senior Lecturer of Politics and International Relations at the University of Edinburgh. Dr. Grek is a Lecturer of Social Policy, also at the University of Edinburgh.

The research has passed the University of Edinburgh's Research Ethics assessment which found that "no reasonably foreseeable ethical risks have been identified" for research participants.